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VOLUME 10 | ISSUE 2

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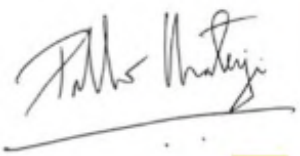
The royal treatment

When I was about six or seven years old, my parents took me to rural Odisha on a holiday. They had friends involved in social work there, and we were staying at their house in a lovely village, the name of which unfortunately eludes me. Their home had a beautiful garden full of mulberry trees in which I ran around all day with their children, and of particular interest to us was a large puddle into which we insisted on repeatedly throwing ourselves — it was about as idyllic a set of circumstances as a child could possibly imagine.

My parents' friend owned a Bullet, and one day he asked if I wanted to go on a ride with him. I may have turned a few cartwheels in excitement, and I ran to where the bike was parked, impatiently hopping from foot to foot as he went about the starting process. It became quickly evident that the Bullet wasn't in any mood to do anything, much less go riding; the more he fiddled with various settings and kicked the starter lever, the less inclined it became to start. My heart sank; my hopes of flying along a country road at top speed were being dashed before my eyes. Eventually, he looked at me apologetically and said we'd try again later — but the damn thing wouldn't start even then.

I bring up this seemingly random incident because it's a good way to point out just how far Royal Enfield has come. For a long time, owning one of their bikes was like entering a cult, one which signified that you were a brawny sort with a hairy chest — but also a person who spent a lot of time alternately loving, cursing, and repairing your bike. No long (or sometimes even short) ride could sensibly be attempted without carrying spare parts. The showroom experience was — wait, what showroom experience? Then there was the well-deserved 'Royal Oilfield' moniker, to name just a few. To go from that to making world-class, beautiful, affordable and — most importantly — reliable motorcycles that consistently win awards is nothing short of spectacular, and to convert the brand's image into a hip, aspirational one along the way isn't half bad either. The all-new Super Meteor you see on the cover seems set to carry this new legacy forward.

A quick note on last month's Auto Expo in Delhi. When I heard that many big brands were skipping it, I honestly wondered whether it was worth attending. With the benefit of hindsight, I can say that those who opted out missed a trick. With all-time record public attendance numbers this year, the Expo would have been a great platform for them to showcase their best products and engage with the public. The brands that did participate saw blockbuster responses to many of their offerings, with the Tata Sierra concept probably being the star of the show. I hope to see a full house at the next Expo. Enjoy the issue.



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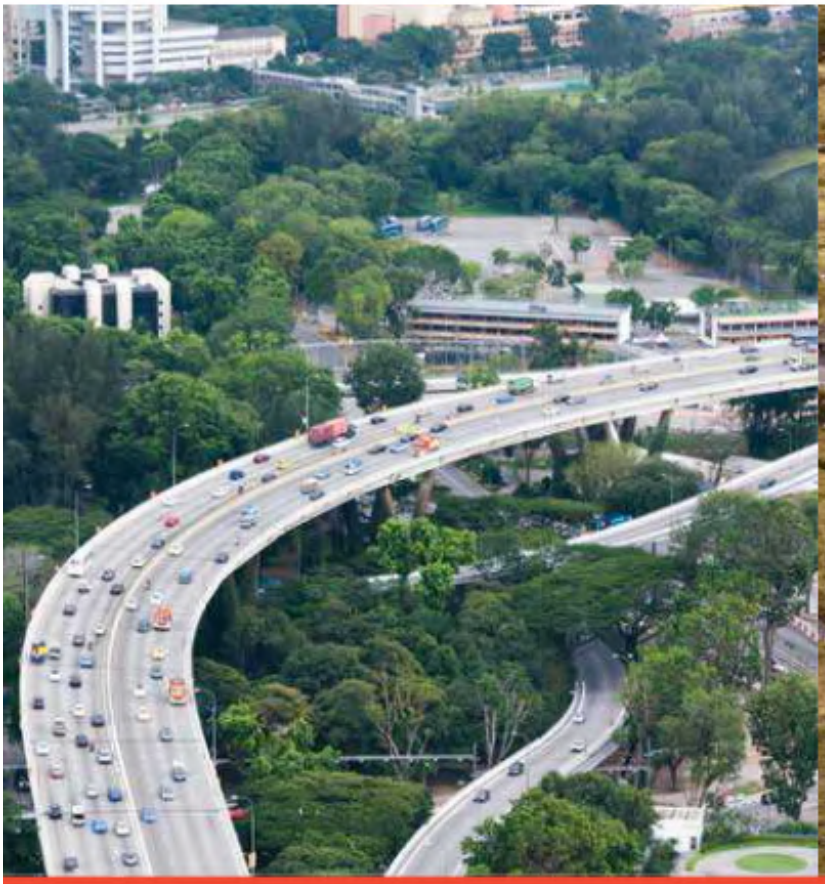

The world as we see it

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REWIND/PLAY
1970 SUZUKI JIMNY/
2023 MARUTI SUZUKI JIMNY

FUN TIMES AWAIT

With a history as rich as the Jimny's, the new one has a solid reputation to uphold

THEN

SUZUKI JIMNY 1970

- The Suzuki LJ10, also known as the Light Jeep 10, first appeared in 1970. The goal was to design a vehicle that could fit into narrow spaces that larger 4x4s couldn't. This was Suzuki's first 4x4 and the first mass-production 4x4 in Japan's domestic mini-car category.
- The LJ10 was a three-seater, and the spare tyre had to be put under the front passenger's seat to meet class external dimension standards. For a compact and light 4x4, it was a simple vehicle with canvas doors and leaf springs to manage big loads. By the way, it weighed only 600 kg.
- The two-stroke, air-cooled Mitsubishi-sourced 360cc engine produced 25 bhp and powered all-four wheels, with a high and low dual-range transfer case for genuine off-road adventures.
- But why Jimny? According to Yukio Sato, managing director of Suzuki Auto South Africa, the name came about as a merger of 'Jeep' and 'Mini' words, a small jeep, at the 50th anniversary of Jimny manufacture in the ADA-Off-road-Center near the Hartbeespoort dam.

NOW

MARUTI SUZUKI JIMNY 2023

- 'It's better late than never', the saying goes, and thanks to Maruti Suzuki, we now have the Jimny, the, dare I say it, successor to the Gypsy. The five-door Jimny, which was unveiled at this year's Auto Expo in India, is a stretched version of the three-door Jimny.
- It has a length of 3985 mm, a width of 1645 mm, a height of 1720 mm, and a wheelbase of 2590 mm. Strangely, the Jimny's width is 45 mm narrower than the Ignis, but has a substantially longer wheelbase than the Thar and Gurkha (by 140 mm and 190 mm, respectively).
- Powering the Jimny is a 103-bhp 1.5-litre petrol engine with 13.69 kgm of torque, mated to either a 5-speed manual or a 4-speed automatic transmission, along with a four-wheel drive system.
- Inside, it gets a three-spoke steering wheel and a standard twin-pod analogue instrument cluster. The fancy part is that it has a 9-inch touchscreen infotainment system with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay. Yes, bookings have already begun. We'd like one in Kinetic Yellow, please. ■

FAST
HENNESSEY VENOM F5 REVOLUTION

TORNADO UNLEASHED

This is the track-focused variant of this blisteringly fast hypercar

The Texas-based tuner, Hennessey, has now unveiled the new Venom F5 Revolution, which is lighter and has more downforce than its predecessors. It's the kind of track monster that fanatics fantasise about, but it's also road legal.

Hennessey has done everything possible to reduce weight, and claims that the hypercar will weigh less than 1360 kg, which is at least 23 kg lighter than previous iterations. Meanwhile, the vehicle's almost carbon-fibre body has been modified with larger diffusers in the front and the back, a brand-new roof scoop, and a massive rear wing with the American flag livery on its end caps. The modifications will significantly increase downforce, allowing for even better handling. Also, the adjustable wing can generate up to 363 kg of downforce at 300 kph and over 635 kg at 400 kph.

Furthermore, the new forged alloy wheels have a larger contact area for superb cornering grip and braking. It also has an aggressively tuned double-wishbone suspension and carbon ceramic brakes as standard.

Finally, Venom F5 Revolution owners get a digital onboard track telemetry system that can measure a variety of data points. Lap times, splits, cornering G-forces, and other metrics are included. The technology allows the driver to monitor the telemetry in real time, or save it for later analysis or archiving.

The Venom F5 has always been a limited-edition vehicle, and the Revolution will be no different. Hennessy plans to build only 24 of the track-focused monsters. The majority of them, however, have already been sold, so if the Revolution is your ideal track-ready hypercar, you better hurry up and pay $2.7 million (approx. ₹ 22.05 crore). ■

LUST
INDIAN ROADMASTER

CUSTOMS AND IMMIGRATIONS

There's an Indian cruiser on this issue's cover, but this is not it. Now that we're mighty pleased with ourselves for that joke, here's a glimpse of the Indian Roadmaster, the superlative kind of American V-twin long-hauler built on a time-honoured template that lives on a steady diet of humongous highway miles. Indian remains one of the few motorcycle manufacturers to successfully implement a 'hood ornament' with its iconic chief's head on the front mudguard, and he looks as stoic as ever. That's a difficult face to pull off, too, with a 116ci V-twin rolling out tarmac-rippling torque that remains a force and experience to aspire to. Perhaps one day we'll see a real Indian like this one? ■

BEHIND THE SINS
THIS IS HOW WE DO IT

WELL WORN

Of late, I've developed quite the affliction for squeaky clean and pristine motorcycles. I don't ever remember being a concours-type person, but here I am now, fretting over the smallest oily smudge and speck of dust on all of my bikes. And I can't tell you of the rage I flew into when some stupid painters left spots of paint on my 390 Adventure, an unholy white pox that I haven't been able to get rid of. So when I found myself on an old seemingly ramshackle old custom Bullet one morning, I was surprised to note that I didn't mind its decrepitude one bit.

Was it because it wasn't mine? I don't think so, seeing as I've been harassing my friends to restore their perfectly running motorcycles. I think it was because it was so far gone, I couldn't help but give in to its aged ways. The early-morning winter sun filled its rusty and dusty surfaces like the most natural paint in the world. And I began to wonder if I should leave some of my unrestored bikes the way they are, imagining what a garage full of old-looking metal might feel like. Until a well-meaning old *sardarji* told me I must take better care of the poor bike. And that was that.

Reventón

DEJA VU

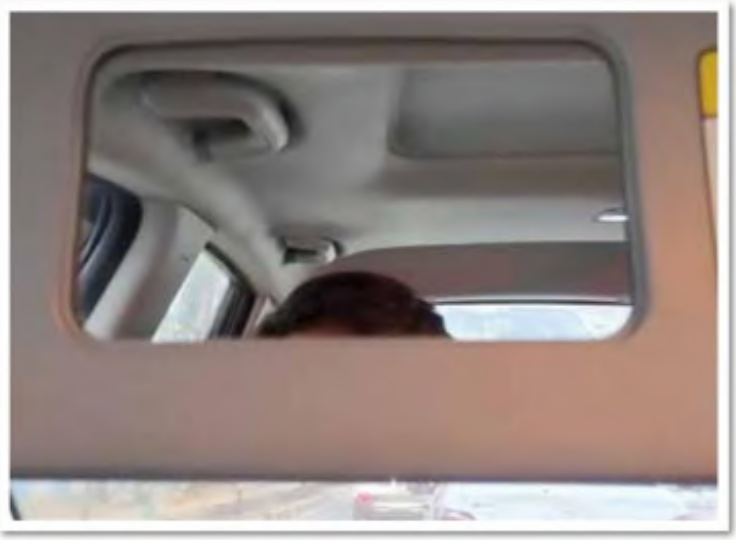
Back when I was this magazine's travel writer, one of the places I decided to go and visit was Murshidabad, in West Bengal; this was in 2007. The town is of great historical significance, having been the seat of power of Siraj-ud-Daulah, the last Nawab of Bengal, whose defeat at the Battle of Plassey led to the beginning of the rule of the East India Company over the sub-continent. It was a hugely wealthy and powerful kingdom and still has some magnificent old monuments, some of them sadly in a state of disrepair. I'd driven there in a Hyundai i10 at that time, and last month I found myself there again on a road trip with my family - in a Hyundai Creta. The more things change...

Gallardo

FAIR WARNING

I had recently been to a gaming arcade with a friend, and as we were hanging around there something caught my eye. It was a funny little cartoon strip with a warning as to how not to use the mallet in the High-striker game. This had us in splits for a little while as we came up with various other scenarios as to how the mallet might be misused. Then it dawned upon me that the warning applied to a lot of other things too, things that could be fun in a controlled environment but very risky in public settings. As stated, certain tools or instruments are meant for specific uses only, and in the hands of an inexperienced person could prove to be very dangerous. This stands true for vehicles as well, because while it is very exciting to learn to drive or ride, one must be sensible enough to do so in a safe and controlled environment and with all the necessary safety precautions in place. And also, we may need more of these funny warning signs for various other things in life. It couldn't hurt to educate some people to pay more heed to certain operational procedures and have a laugh while at it.

Sterrato



UNUSED ACCESSORY

Recently, I used a car accessory for the very first time since I first sat in one some 35-odd-years ago. It was the day after Auto Expo 2023 ended (at least for the media) and I was understandably exhausted after two very late nights, and days filled with running from stall to stall. A late start was almost mandated by my battered body, which meant I was, potentially, going to be late for my flight back to Mumbai. And so, I rushed out, got in the car, and started using the mirror behind the sun visor for the very first time. I've seen it being used by passengers before, but this was my first, and it came as something of a surprise, as I thought I'd never need it. I wonder if there'll be another such part of a car that I haven't used yet, but that I will find some utility for.

Sian

SHUTTERBUG

I like tagging along for shoots even when I might not be required. The first reason for that, is to be able to observe the photographers when they are clicking pictures, and I then follow suit by trying to take a shot from the same view point, but from a different angle. The above Sins image is the result of it, and I am told it ticks almost all the boxes for an ideal frame. The second reason is to watch sunrises from different locations, and each and every time, it feels great to watch. To many more sunrises and better pictures.

Bizzarrini

OPENING PORTALS

I don't miss the Mumbai local train at all. Not one bit. Scrambling through the crowds at the Auto Expo reminded me of our city's perennially packed Mumbai local trains. At the Tata booth, everyone crammed right in front of the stage to get a better shot of the Tata cars, so I had to find an unoccupied corner. Thankfully, the cars were going to be stationed on turntables, so I held the corner fort. I was shooting from behind the scenes, literally. But when they unveiled the Tata Curvv, I couldn't take my eyes off it. The Curvv looked brilliant in that bright red paint! And almost everything about it was aggressive and edgy, from the sharp creases to the powerful stance. Also, the turquoise light leaking from the displays behind the Curvv gave the impression that it had stepped out of a portal. I like the Curvv already..

Terzo Millennio

THE GRAPEVINE
IN THE NEWS

ON THE MOVE

This is the all-electric Citroen eC3! It appears to be identical to the C3's ICE counterpart, although there are several small differences on the eC3. First and foremost, the eC3 has a 29.2-kWh battery pack with an ARAI-rated range of up to 320 km. The battery pack supports DC fast charging and can charge from 10 to 80 per cent in 57 minutes. It would take 10.5 hours to charge from 10 to 100 per cent using a 15-A power outlet.

Furthermore, its electric engine is rated at 56.2 horsepower and 14.58 kgm, and Citroen boasts it'll go from 0-60 kph in 6.8 seconds, and hit an electronically limited top speed of 107 kph. The eC3 has manual air conditioning and a digitised instrument cluster. It also features a huge 10-inch touchscreen entertainment system with Bluetooth, Android Auto, and Apple CarPlay. In the centre console, there is also a toggle-type drive selector. There is 315 litres of boot space available, with a spare wheel room beneath it. You can select between two options: Live and Feel. Let the EV wars begin!

BUILDING UP

The all-electric XUV400 is Mahindra's first vehicle launch of the year. Prices range from ₹ 15.99 lakh to ₹ 18.99 lakh (all prices, ex-showroom). There are two options available: EC and EL. The EC models only have 34.5-kWh battery, while the EL variant has a 39.4-kWh battery. The XUV400 is powered by an electric motor that generates 148 bhp and 31.66 kgm. It has three drive modes that are adjusted for steering, throttle response, and regeneration. According to Mahindra, it can go from 0 to 100 kilometres per hour in 8.3 seconds.

In terms of range, the smaller battery pack in the EC models provides just 375 km (MIDC), whereas the larger one provides 456 km (MIDC). A DC fast charger can charge either battery from 0 to 80 per cent in about 50 minutes. It has a 7.0-inch touchscreen infotainment system with over 60 connected car functions, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto compatibility, automated lighting and wipers, electric ORVMs, and an electric sunroof. Here's another EV for you to consider.

ABOUT TIME

Honda has unveiled a new teaser image for their forthcoming model. This time, we can confirm that it is the new Amaze-based SUV that is set to debut this summer. The Hyundai Creta, Kia Seltos, Skoda Kushaq, and VW Taigun are expected to compete with the new model. The teaser image shows the new Honda SUV's strong styling. With LED daytime running lights and circular fog lamps installed on the front bumper, the front fascia is nearly vertical. The SUV has a broad wheel arches and a powerful shoulder line. The new model will most likely be driven by the same 1.5-litre naturally aspirated petrol engine as the City. Higher trim levels may be available with the strong-hybrid powertrain. A 5-speed manual, CVT, and an e-drive powertrain are all possible transmission options.

WITHIN REACH

You won't have to break the bank for an all-new Mahindra Thar if you don't want to take it off-roading. That's because the Thar is now available with rear-wheel drive, with prices starting at ₹ 9.99 lakh and going up to ₹ 13.49 lakh (ex-showroom). It also comes in two trim levels: AX (O) and LX. You can choose either the D117 1.5-litre diesel engine, which makes its debut on the Thar, producing 117 bhp and 30.59 kgm of torque paired with a 6-speed manual transmission. The other choice is the well-known 2.0-litre turbo-petrol, which delivers 150 bhp and 32.63 kgm. It comes with a 6-speed automatic transmission. The introductory discounts apply to the first 10,000 bookings, and deliveries will commence on 14 January. Have you booked one already?

STAR-STUDDED

Mercedes-Benz has launched the AMG E 53 Cabriolet in the Indian market. It has four seats as well as an electric folding soft top. Up front, it gets an AMG-exclusive Panamericana grille and a beefy front bumper. At the back, the car has subtle sporty accents like quad exhausts. Inside, it features an AMG-specific three-spoke steering wheel and a dual-screen arrangement that includes a digital instrument cluster and a touchscreen infotainment system. The safety package has seven airbags and driver-assistance technologies, including adaptive cruise control, a pop-up roll bar, and attention assist.

Powering the E 53 Cabriolet is a 429-bhp 3.0-litre turbo-petrol engine with mild-hybrid technology. It produces 53.03 kgm of torque and is mated to a 9-speed automatic transmission that transmits power to all-four wheels via the 4Matic+ all-wheel drive system. It also includes AMG's Ride Control+ air suspension. Mercedes claims the E 53 Cabriolet can accelerate from 0-100 kph in 4.5 seconds, and has an electronically limited top speed of 250 kph. A lifelong experience of on-the-go hair spa treatment will set you back ₹ 1.30 crore (ex-showroom). Only once.

SHORT BURSTS

BIG PACKAGE

BMW has launched the facelifted X7 in India, with prices starting at ₹ 1.22 crore for the xDrive40i petrol, and going up to ₹ 1.25 crore (all prices ex-showroom, India) for the xDrive40d diesel. The M Sport package comes standard on both models.

SLASHED PRICES

Prices for the new Tata Nexon EV start from ₹ 14.49 lakh and go up to ₹ 18.99 lakh (all prices ex-showroom). Notably, its range has been increased to 453 km (MIDC). The entry-level model gets projector headlamps with LED daytime running lights, push-button start, a digital instrument cluster, cruise control, and automatic climate control, among other features.

NEW FACES

The Hyundai Grand i10 and Aura have a new look. The Grand i10 now boasts a revamped front grille and bumpers, as well as new wraparound tail lights and Y-shaped LED daytime running lights. The Aura compact sedan, on the other hand, receives a redesigned front face that comprises a new bumper, grille, and L-shaped LED daytime running lights.

GODZILLA'S AWAKE

Even if the Godzilla has reawakened, the Japanese version of the updated Nissan GT-R features only relatively minor changes. It has an entirely new front end, though, including a new grille that replaces the R35's trademark 'V' shaped snout, a new lower bumper design, and new fog lights. The rear retains the quad-exhaust configuration, but adds a new bumper design. There are now eight special edition models to pick from.

All cars retain the 3.8-litre twin-turbo VR38DETT engine. Output remains the same as before. The standard GT-Rs get 562 bhp, while the two Nismo editions come with the same 592 bhp. The engine is paired to the same 6-speed dual-clutch gearbox that sends power to all-four wheels. Aside from that, Nissan claims that all automobiles are now more aerodynamic. The GT-R Premium edition features finely tuned suspension and carbon brakes. The Nismo editions receive a mechanical limited slip diff on the front-end drive, improved aerodynamics, and even more suspension tuning.

KEEPING 'EM ALIVE

Toyota debuted two AE86s at this year's Tokyo Auto Salon, and they're not powered in the way you might imagine. One is an electric version (AE86 BEV), and the other is a hydrogen-powered (AE86 H2). The hydrogen vehicle is powered by Toyota's 4A-GEU 1.6-litre four-cylinder engine, which has been upgraded to run on hydrogen stored in two hydrogen tanks from the Toyota Mirai. The AE86 BEV features the same battery pack as a Toyota Prius PHEV and the Tundra HEV's electric motor. The result is an all-electric AE86 that produces 90 bhp and 19.37 kgm of torque, while also featuring a 6-speed manual transmission. Other aftermarket accessories that add to the cars' carbon-neutral ethos include rejuvenated used seats, and seat belt pads produced from recycled materials. Would you still be interested in these famous drift machines?

SL DELIVERY

This is the Mercedes-AMG SL 63 'Collector's Edition'. The Silver Arrows-themed SL is inspired by Mercedes' W13 E Performance racing car, which finished third last season. By the way, Mercedes-AMG intends to produce only 100 roadsters worldwide. The limited-edition roadster has two-tone paint that transitions from high-tech silver metallic in the front to obsidian black metallic at the back. Blue Petronas accents can also be found on the front apron, side panels, and rear diffuser of the SL 63. Mercedes-AMG applied the Mercedes star design to the back as a nod to the engine cover of the Formula One car. The AMG Night package and AMG Night package II enhance the car's aesthetic appearance. The AMG Night option adds a gloss black design to the front splitter, side sills, mirror caps, and rear diffuser. The AMG Night package II, which comprises the radiator grille, adds black chrome for the typography and a Mercedes star at the back. It retains the same 577-bhp 4.0-litre V8 engine that can take you from 0-100 kph in 3.6 seconds before hitting the limiter at 315 kph.

VISION CHECK

At the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, BMW unveiled the i Vision Dee. The German manufacturer calls it a futuristic all-electric sedan concept that aims to provide a 'Digital Emotional Experience' (Dee). It highlights the design and technologies that could appear on future BMW cars built on the brand's Neue Klasse electric architecture. It has a three-box sedan body type and carries over a lot of BMW characteristics. This includes the distinctive kidney grille, twin headlights, and the Hofmeister kink. The interior features a bespoke steering wheel with central touchpoints that can be operated with the thumb. The prototype also has an unusual head-up display that projects information across the entire width of the windscreen.

The latest edition of BMW's E Ink technology is the highlight feature of the BMW i Vision Dee. The E Ink technology was initially shown off on the iX at CES 2022, although it was only available in black and white. Since the iX Flow, the technology has advanced significantly; one can customise the exterior of the i Vision Dee in up to 32 different colours. There is an 'ePaper' film put to the body, separated into 240 E Ink segments, each of which may be controlled separately with a choice of up to 32 colours. There are no performance figures because this is a concept vehicle. In any case, how do you interpret all of this?

EQUILIBRIUM

Lexus debuted its most intense electric vehicle concept at the 2023 Tokyo Auto Salon. The car you see here is a fusion of performance thrills and environmental equity. The RZ Sport Concept EV, inspired by Lexus' original RZ electric car, takes things to the next level. It is finished in beautiful white paint dubbed 'Hakugin,' which has a delicate shimmer in certain light. Underneath, it is powered by two 150-kW (201 bhp) electric motors. However, under the leadership of pro racing driver Masahiro Sasaki, its suspension, chassis, and interior have been modified and enhanced. As a result, its ride height has dropped by 35 mm; it has aggressive aero, larger wheels and tyres, and full racing bucket seats in the front and rear. Now, that's what we call the 'best of both worlds'.

COOL
HOT STUFF

HITS DIFFERENT

This Walkman is looking for you, '90s kids

What is it?
This is the Sony NW-A306 Walkman. Yes, they are still alive.

Why is it cool?
The NW-A306 is a new portable music player powered by Android. The aluminium Walkman weighs only 113 grams. It features a 3.6-inch touchscreen, 32 GB of internal storage, and physical buttons for controlling the user interface and volume. The Walkman uses an AI-powered sound engine dubbed DSEE Ultimate, which can upscale compressed music and improve CD quality 16-bit lossless codec audio. Sony's S-Master HX digital amp is also included.

Besides this, it supports a variety of audio formats, gets Android 12, and one can install music streaming apps via the Google Play Store. It has a USB Type-C port, a stereo mini-jack, a microSD card slot, Wi-Fi (2.4 GHz + 5 GHz), and Bluetooth 5.0. It can operate for up to 36 hours on a single charge, or 26 hours if music streaming services are used.

Is it expensive?
The modern Sony Walkman will set you back by £350 (approx. ₹ 35,505).

SCREEN FLEX

Multitasking should be a joy with this shapeshifting laptop

What is it?
A shapeshifting dual-screen laptop, that's the Lenovo Yoga Book 9i for you.

Why is it cool?
The Yoga Book 9i has a 13.3-inch 2.8K OLED panel on top and another 13.3-inch screen on the bottom. A keyboard, kickstand, and stylus are also included in the bundle. There will be three USB-C Thunderbolt 4 connections, up to 16 GB of RAM, up to 1 TB PCIe SSD Gen4 SSD storage, WiFi 6E, and a 5-megapixel webcam for video conferencing, and these are just the highlights.

You can use a variety of gestures to truly optimise the two screens for whatever job you're trying to do. In waterfall mode, you can navigate between screens by flicking between web pages and apps, or you can simply scroll continuously. If you need a smaller device to use in a café or on an aircraft, it can easily be folded into a standard 13-inch laptop.

Is it expensive?
The price is projected to start around $2,000 (₹ 1.65 lakh), and it will be available by June 2023. ■

U-TURN

ADITYA UPADHYAULA
@heelntoe

GATEKEEPING

I used to have an incredibly difficult time falling asleep, often tossing and turning well into the night, only to wake up in the morning feeling tired. At some point in the last decade, I decided to try and fix my sleeping habits by cutting down on my caffeine intake, reducing screen time just before bedtime and avoiding working in my bedroom altogether. It definitely helped, because I found myself falling asleep almost as soon as my head hit the pillow. After what seemed like years of sleeping well, I feel myself relapsing these days. It is just so easy to keep doom scrolling through social media on my phone. Try as hard as I might, it is hard to get away from the instant gratification of social media and the targeted content it shows me. That targeted content, for me, usually has something to do with food or cars. I mean, with years of browsing history and data collected from me, social media algorithms have pretty much figured out what I like to watch, and they deliver that content to me in a never ending stream of short, easy-to-digest videos.

Lately, the almighty algorithm has decided that I should be watching awkward and embarrassing automotive videos showcasing a side of car culture I have never quite understood. I've been watching videos featuring lowriders — cars slammed so low to the ground, they can barely drive down the road without scraping paint and creating sparks. In general, I tend to lean toward function over form when it comes to my automotive projects, so seeing something that is built purely for form, often at the cost of function is baffling to me. I also realized that some of these examples were so bad — like a train wreck — that I couldn't look away, with poorly executed attempts at humor and poorly produced videos.

After a few days of mindlessly watching these videos, I was ready

> "Would I ever build and drive a lowrider?"

to dismiss this entire subculture and move on with my life. But upon reflection, it seems I failed to notice the most critical parts of those videos, which were the passionate individuals putting their time and effort into creating something that truly brings them joy. And for me to dismiss them just because it does not match my idea of what a car should be is ridiculous, especially at a time when car culture itself is shrinking a little in modern society. With an increasing emphasis on sustainability, the increasing popularity of electric vehicles and alternative forms of transportation, anyone that propagates the love of internal combustion engines and sense of community within the automotive world deserves every bit of their social media spotlight.

Now, would I ever build and drive a lowrider? Probably not, but I am truly happy that they exist. Unlike some trends, these lowriders are certainly not hurting anybody. And what's more, they are someone's artistic expression, definitely not worthy of my hate and ridicule. Car cultureencompasses a wide range of automotive subcultures, and while I don't necessarily relate to many of these subcultures, I don't think I'm in any sort of position to be gatekeeping them, either. I admit, I tried to define the boundaries of what is considered legitimate or acceptable when, really, I should be celebrating the fact that there are ever more people getting into the car community and enjoying themselves while they're at it.

I should also work on fixing my sleeping habits again, because sleep deprivation is what often causes cognitive impairment and irritability, which can often lead to impulsive conclusions.

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SHORT SHIFT
CITROEN EC3

POWERING UP

The Citroen C3 now comes in a fully electric avatar. We find out what it's like

By *Pablo Chaterji* ***Photographs*** *Amit Naik*

With the accelerator pinned to the floor, the speedometer reading 108 kph, and a long straight of the Wabco Proving Ground near Chennai ahead of me, I could think of only these words: 'this isn't optimal.' Normally, when driving a car on what is effectively a race track, I'd rub my hands in glee at the prospect of pushing the said car to its limit down a straight — but not on this occasion.

For one thing, I'd already maxed the Citroen eC3 out on the sweeping right-hander leading to the straight, and there was no way the car was going to go any faster since it's limited to 108 kph. For another, a race track or proving ground isn't the place to judge a car that's been built for the inanities of real-world urban traffic; driving it round and round at speed — on a smooth surface - for an hour tells you little about how it'll perform when there's a lorry breathing down your neck and stray cattle forming a fleshy barrier directly ahead of you. If I'm honest, it does the car a disservice, and everything you read here on in comes with the disclaimer 'in ideal test conditions.'

Citroen launched the ICE C3 roughly six months ago, and it would be the first to admit that the funky hatchback hasn't exactly set the sales charts aflame; it *should* also admit that the C3 was hamstrung from the start due to a lack of features, among other factors; this is a pity because the C3 was (and is) a car with potential. Having said that, launching an electric version of a car just six months after its ICE counterpart is commendable, and the move comes at a time when interest in EVs is at an all-time high — and EV sales figures reflect this. This isn't just a case of jumping on the bandwagon, either — Citroen has big plans globally, with a variety of full-BEV platforms of different sizes and significant investments in the software aspects of electrification, and its India plans form a big part of that strategy.

The brass tacks, then. The eC3 is visually no different from its petrol-powered sibling, other some 'e' and 'eC3' badging under the ORVMs and at the rear respectively. It remains a very attractive-looking car from every angle, especially the front three-quarters, and a top-spec car with alloy wheels and a two-tone paint scheme does stand out on the road; the orange and white combination remains my favourite,

“Citroen believes that a huge level of customisation options is what buyers are looking for, but personally...”

and there are four monotone and nine dual-tone options, alongside three customisation packs. Citroen believes that a huge level of customisation options is what buyers are looking for, but personally, I think that too much choice isn't always ideal — the buffet-fatigue factor sets in, at least with me. Nevertheless, there's no doubt that the eC3 scores well on the exterior front and is probably the best-looking car in its class.

The cabin isn't any different, either — which is to say that it remains a mixed bag. In terms of overall space and comfort, there's no cause for complaint; five adults will be quite comfortable inside, and will also find it easy to get in and out of the car, and the seats are supportive. Two interior trims — Anodised Orange and Anodised Grey — are available, with the principal difference being the colour of the dashboard. Ergonomics are fine, too, and there are just about enough storage spaces inside; the boot is a capacious 315 litres, and importantly, there's a (slightly smaller) spare wheel tucked away under the loading area. A 26-cm touchscreen infotainment system is standard in the top-spec car, and it comes with wireless Android Auto and Apple Carplay. The MyCitroen Connect app offers various features — charger location, battery status, geo-fencing, SOS alerts, and so on. Twin front airbags and ABS with EBD are standard. The AC cools very quickly, and the audio system cranks out some acceptable sound; steering-mounted controls are on offer.

The niggles are the same — no reversing camera (only sensors), wireless phone charger, or sunroof even as options, and the ORVMs still have to be manually adjusted with stalks, which is a bit odd, to put it mildly. The digital instrument cluster still looks a bit dull and is rather small, and the materials used in the cabin don't feel that premium — cost-cutting is a little too evident.

The eC3 comes with a 29.2-kWh battery, with a claimed 320 km of range when fully juiced up; as usual, you have to take that with a pinch of salt — the test car I was driving showed a range of 220 km at a battery level of 97 per cent. The permanent magnet synchronous motor sends 56.2 bhp and 14.58 kgm of torque to the front wheels, neither of which are world-beating

There's some of the whine of the motor, and rad and wind noise, that filters in at speed

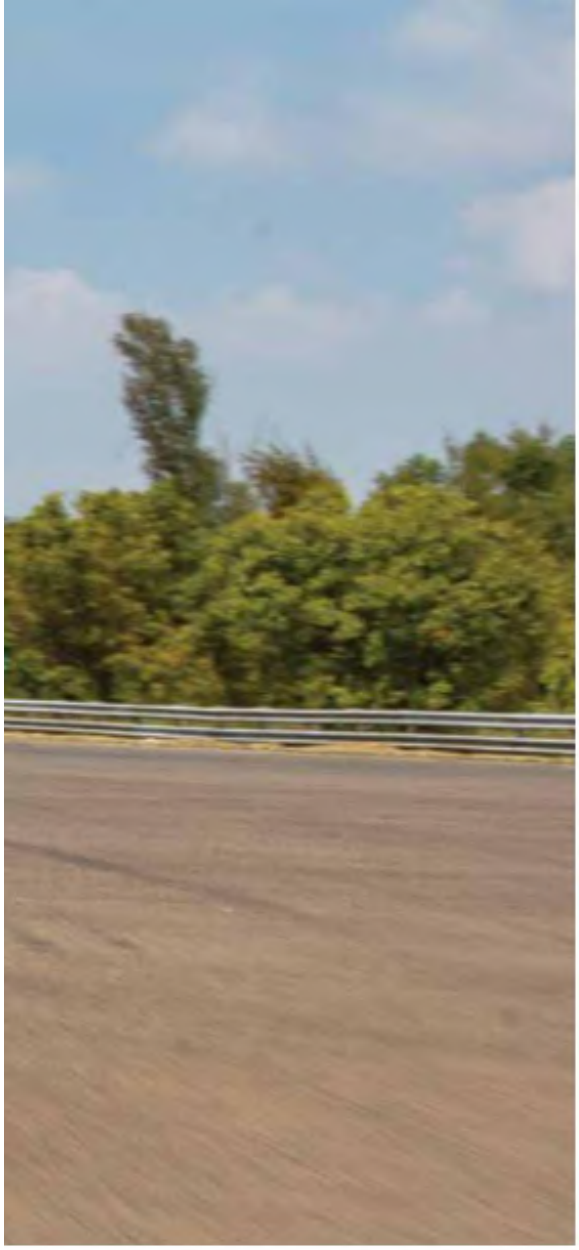
"To sum up, the eC3 has a slightly springy ride that becomes more apparent at speed, and it handles capably enough in most conditions"

numbers. The startup procedure isn't the most intuitive — you have to turn the key once, wait for the various telltale lights to come on and go off, see if the 'Ready' sign has lit up, and then turn the key one step further, at which point the car settles into a steady hum. Press the brake, slot the (rather neat) gear selector into D and you're good to go.

In regular D mode, the eC3 takes off from a standstill quickly enough, with Eco mode slowing things down a shade; it's best left for the urban traffic grind, in order to conserve battery. Acceleration is reasonably brisk, with a noticeable drop in velocity as you begin to near the 108 kph top speed, after which you're resigned to holding that pace. Even for a city car, I think that's too low a number; 120 kph would have been a logical speed to limit the vehicle to for the odd highway run, but charge conservation appears to have been the motive. There's braking regeneration on offer, but you can't adjust its levels. The familiar electric motor whine is present, and it's a sound that you'll just have to get used to; there's also a fair amount of wind and tyre noise coming into the cabin.

The steering wheel is a chunky unit — and it's also quite heavy for a car of this size. I didn't mind this at all, because I like steering wheels with heft, but I'm not sure how consumers who are used to super-light steering wheels will react. Heading down the track at full tilt, the eC3 felt stable despite a certain amount of pogo-ing; the tight right-hander at the end of the straight had a 20 kph speed limit, so naturally I flung the car into it at around 70 kph to see what the tyres were capable of. The brakes were sharp enough to haul the car in from its top speed quickly, and there was enough grip to go through the corner without my heart in my mouth. The tyres did squeal a bit, and body roll wasn't exactly absent, but I wasn't expecting anything less. The next proper corner, a longer right-hand sweeper, allowed me to hold 108 kph without any issues. To sum up, the eC3 has a slightly springy ride that becomes more apparent at speed, and it handles capably enough in most conditions.

Citroen claims that the air-cooled



The boot is large enough to hold enough luggage for more than just a weekend trip

It's attractive, but needs a bit more visual differentiators

Its range means it'll likely be be used in urban environs

lithium-ion battery will go from 10 to 80 per cent in 57 minutes with a DC fast charger — and you can keep fast-charging without having to break the cycle with lower capacity chargers; a portable charger plugs into a regular 15 amp socket and will allow a 10 to 100 per cent charge in 10 hours 30 minutes. Citroen has tied up with Jio-bp for its network of chargers, and your other options are to go to a Citroen showroom or call a 24x7 mobile charging unit in case of an emergency. The warranties are pretty comprehensive — seven years/1.4 lakh km for the battery, five years/1 lakh km for the motor, and three years/1.25 lakh km for the car (whichever is earlier in all cases); extended warranties and maintenance packages are available at dealerships.

At an estimated ex-showroom price of ₹ 10 lakh onwards, the eC3 would make an excellent case for itself as an urban runabout. A full charge would last you around a week, and the car would be a comfortable companion throughout if you can live with its lack of a comprehensive feature set. Even though Citroen is still in its infancy in India, it does plan to more than double its network of showrooms and service stations in the country this year, and it offers a 24/7 roadside assistance service as well, as mentioned earlier. As things stand, the eC3 isn't perfect — but it'll get the job done well enough for most. ■

AUTODATA

CITROËN EC3

POWERTRAIN	
Battery	29.2 kWh
Max Power	56 bhp
Max Torque	14.58 kgm
Range	320 km (MIDC)
Charging time (DC Fast Charger)	57 minutes (10-80 per cent)
TYRES	
Type	195/65 R15
DIMENSIONS	
L/W/H (mm)	3981/1733/1604
Wheelbase	2540 mm
Ground clearance	NA
Kerb weight	1316 kg
PRICE	₹ **10** LAKH, (ex-showroom, India)

VWUNDERBAR

Volkswagen's India journey has been nothing short of inspirational

MH14 TCL 250

MH 14 TCL 264

When the Volkswagen Group entered India more than two decades ago, no one thought they'd become the tour de force that they are now. Okay, they are the ones who made the people's car, their wide range of brands and extremely capable products are a thing of envy for rival conglomerates, and innovation never takes a back seat at VW. Having said that, one mustn't forget that the Indian market can be a tough nut to crack — and many carmakers learnt that the hard way. Volkswagen, though, had a different plan altogether.

Starting the Volkswagen India range with a top-drawer product like the VW Polo and continuing with it for a decade, the brand showed what they were capable of. The influx of global products — from the Beetle, Jetta, Passat, etc. to luxury-focussed ones like the Touareg and Phaeton, and not to forget, grossly underrated ones like the T-Roc — meaning no matter how big or small your budget was, there was a Volkswagen ready to win your heart and its well-earned space on your drive. The local range of Polo-based products enabled VW to continue offering Indian customers segment-topping cars (in terms of performance, safety, driving dynamics, build quality... you name it) and competitive prices. Their interest in the Indian market soared to new heights with the introduction of a thoroughly impressive motorsport division, which didn't just allow Indian racers to showcase their talent here but also use it as a ladder to compete in a variety of global race series. A paragraph is most definitely not enough space to list out how seriously Volkswagen viewed the Indian market right from day one, but this ought to give you an idea that if you offer the Indian customer great products, they'd welcome you with arms wide open.

Another reason behind Volkswagen's success is the brand's ability to quickly recognise the market's needs and strategise accordingly. Towards the end of the 2010s, it was evident that to maximise its appeal, the SUV segment had to be taken more seriously. And thus came the SUVW approach, under which, the brand reiterated its focus on the Indian market with a wide range of sport utility vehicles, made available across different prices, again offering something for everyone. Its added impetus came courtesy of VW Group's India 2.0 strategy. Now called Skoda Auto Volkswagen India (Pvt. Ltd.), the group announced an investment of a whopping EUR 1 billion to further strengthen its presence in the Indian market.

The first INR 2000 crore led to the establishment of the brand's technical centre in Pune. This is where they worked on the brand-new platform that now underpins Volkswagen's two most successful modern products: the VW Taigun and the Virtus. Called MQB-A0-IN, the platform is a clear mix of Volkswagen's engineering skills and high levels of localisation. Joining the SUV and the saloon is the VW Tiguan, a five-seat SUV that epitomises Germanic standards that none of its rivals can match. With its three-product-wide portfolio, the brand is extremely focussed with its approach, but at the same time, offering exactly what it's been traditionally known for: quality.

And everyone seems to love that, too. The eventual (and inevitable) demise of the Polo could've left a gaping hole in the model range. And ardent VW fans wouldn't have let that go unnoticed, either. But take a drive in either of the MQB-A0-IN products,

“Another reason behind Volkswagen's success is the brand's ability to quickly recognise the market's needs and strategise accordingly”

and you'd be able to appreciate that both the Taigun and Virtus are modern-day iterations of VW's India-focussed products. Great space, check. Unrivalled looks, check. A wide range of engine and gearbox choices, a big check. And most importantly, the robustness that only a VW car can offer, you can almost hear VW enthusiasts unanimously saying: check. Safety is another parameter where Volkswagen has always been at the forefront, and the Taigun recently reaffirmed that. Under Global NCAP's latest test protocol, the SUV scored a full-fat FIVE stars. That not just means it's well ahead of its rivals, but it also proves that if you're buying a Volkswagen in India, you can be assured that it's got your back. Always.

Does that mean they'd skimp on features? Well, other brands might, but not VW — they understand the needs and demands of the Indian customer. From a high-quality touchscreen audio system, sunroof, premium cabin that looks and feels great, and all-digital instrument cluster, to a host of connected-car tech (My VW Connect Plus), both the Taigun and Virtus are loaded to the brim. And then there are 40+ safety features including up to 6 airbags, driver aids like ESC and Hill-Hold, and Multi-Collision Braking. Ownership too has been made easy with added peace of mind by Volkswagen 4EVER Care included standard and lucrative service packages.

This is by no means a dig at brands which couldn't work in India but a clear indication that if you plan your products right, the Indian market isn't exactly a tough nut to crack. Even if you have large shoes to fill. Just ask Volkswagen!

3 SERIES MAX LITE

The long-wheelbase 3 Series has been given a small nip and tuck

By *Rivan RS* ***Photographs*** *Govind Gadekar*

Just two years after the BMW 3 Series Gran Limousine arrived in India, the German luxury brand has brought in a facelift for it. The entry-level luxury limo — essentially the long-wheelbase version of the current G20 3 Series — has been well-received in our market, despite the less than stellar start, and with this update, BMW is looking to build even more momentum. At first glance, it seems like a relatively minor facelift, but we're trying to find out how that impacts what's arguably BMW's most coveted nameplate, at least for enthusiasts, the 3 Series.

The model seen on these pages is the 330Li M Sport — the top-spec petrol version — and as such it features some rather sporty bits. The new grille, the front bumper with its large air dams, and the sleek all-LED headlights seem to be lifted off the M340i. Those two-tone 18-inch alloys tread the line between elegant and sporty quite well, and that stretched wheelbase length does make itself known, but it didn't seem incongruous, as the shoulder line with its Hofmeister link adds some much needed muscle and definition to the body. The rear looks similar to the outgoing model, but receives tweaked (and lovely-looking) LED tail lights, an athletic bumper with a faux diffuser, and trapezoidal chrome-tipped exhaust pipes.

Those who've been keeping themselves up to date with the newest crop of BMWs, particularly the i4, will find the 3 Series Gran

Limousine's cabin a familiar place. The reshaped dashboard features some nicely textured beige leather, and black and grey plastics, along with redesigned air-con vents, giving the interior a premium feel. The new curved display is reminiscent of Mercedes-Benz or Mahindra's combined screens, which includes a 14.9-inch infotainment touchscreen, and a 12.3-inch digital instrument cluster. Like every new BMW, the infotainment system and the digital cluster run the extremely smooth and intuitive iDrive 8 OS, and the gesture and voice controls also work well enough.

Seat comfort, both at the front and rear, is top-notch, and the panoramic sunroof adds a great sense of airiness. The bright cabin theme also suits the 3 Series Gran Limousine's more relaxed nature, and makes the rear even more inviting. Calling the space for two at the back ample is a serious understatement, and even headroom is more than decent despite that tapering roofline. However, the overall quality seems to have taken a slight downturn — fit and finish under the dash and seats didn't seem to be up to BMW standards, but these bits aren't all that visible.

For those looking for an above par chauffeur-driven experience will continue to find the 3 Series Gran Limousine on their shortlist. You'd be hard-pressed to find a better ride-handling balance at this price point, as BMW has opted for a softer suspension setup than the

standard 3 Series. This has resulted in a very pliant ride, with even the worst of Mumbai's roads barely filtering in. The long wheelbase and relatively low ground clearance means that you'll have to pull the usual side-to-side manoeuvre to get over the larger speed breakers, but other than that, the 3 Series Gran Limousine is quite easy to drive in the city, despite its size. Highway cruising is also the 330Li's forte — it'll mile-munch with the best, and leave you relatively fresh even after a long journey.

What the soft suspension also results in is compromised handling, but only relative to the standard 3 Series. Take a sharp corner at speed, and you'll feel the body roll, and even in Sport mode, the steering didn't feel as feelsome and direct as the normal wheelbase version. In fact, that extra length does make itself felt when you're trying to have some sideways fun with this rear-wheel drive BMW. It isn't as confidence-inspiring to push hard on a set of twisties, but it is enjoyable enough in short stints, especially in a straight line. And in spite of not measuring up to the standard 3 Series, the Gran Limousine is still among the better handlers when compared to contemporaries like the Mercedes-Benz C-Class or Audi A4.

At least the 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbo-petrol engine is more or less unrestrained, yet refined. Making 255 bhp and 40.79 kgm of peak torque, this unit is capable of propelling the luxury sedan to 100 kph in just over 6 seconds. Power is sent to the rear wheels only via a superbly smooth 8-speed automatic gearbox. The engine note is thrilling in the top-end, though still muted enough not to attract unwanted attention. All in all, like the rest of the Gran Limousine, the drivability is quite an acceptable compromise between sporty and leisurely. However, to me, this means that the Gran Limo may be branded incorrectly.

Branding is a funny thing, and can often result in misleading the consumer. Take Pepsi Max, for example — it's the low-calorie, sugar-free version of Pepsi, but the name suggests it offers more, rather than less. I've found the BMW 3 Series Gran Limousine's value to be in this vein, as it doesn't really live up to the thrilling 3 Series nameplate (hence the Lite), but what it does have is the attention of the Indian audience.

Priced at ₹ 57.9 lakh, ex-showroom, India, this 330 Li will seem worth the cost to anyone who wants a spacious, modern, and comfortable entry-level luxury limo, that'll also entertain every once in a while — in other words, it'll trump its closest rival (the C-Class) on price, driver engagement, and interior space. The compromise that enthusiasts will know exists is off-set to a great degree by the plushness on offer, which, for most Indian buyers, is a worthy substitute. ■

Typical of modern luxury cars, screens dominate the dash, but it is well-integrated here and isn't overbearing

AUTODATA

BMW 330Li M SPORT

POWERTRAIN	
Displacement	1998cc, I4, turbo-petrol
Max power	255 bhp@5000 rpm
Max torque	40.79 kgm@1550-4400 rpm
Transmission	8AT
TYRES	
Type	225/45 R18 / 255 40 R18
DIMENSIONS	
L/W/H (mm)	4823/1827/1441
Wheelbase	2961 mm
PRICE	₹ **57.9** LAKH, (ex-showroom, India)

NEW & STILL GRAND

The refreshed third-gen Grand i10 Nios continues to deliver on its promise

By *Rivan RS* ***Photographs*** *Govind Gadekar*

The Hyundai Grand i10 Nios has been a staple of the Korean brand's portfolio in the Indian market, ever since it was first launched as the Grand i10 back in September 2013. Now, the Nios is the most affordable Hyundai car you can buy, but does that mean the entry-level model is no longer worth it? Does the 2023 Nios facelift carry on the legacy created by the now, nearly-venerable Grand i10? We had a day out with the 2023 Hyundai Grand i10 Nios to answer those questions.

It's somewhat satisfying to see that although the new Nios looks appropriately, well... new, even compared to the pre-facelift model, but still retains the old Grand i10's silhouette. Hyundai has done quite a good job of hiding what is essentially a tall-boy design, which can only be noticed the the size of the glass house when seen from the side. The major design differentiators include the slimmer automatic projector headlights, arrow-shaped DRLs (no fog light cluster in the revised front bumper), a new grille, and new 15-inch alloys. However, it is the rear of the Grand i10 Nios that really catches the eye — the new LED tail lights and the LED bar that connects them are typically new-age Hyundai, and rather fetching.

It's a similar story on the inside in terms of living up to its predecessors, though the changes are lesser in number. The dual-tone grey interior theme continues, as does the usual bevy of segment-leading features (which is par for the course for Hyundai) such as the 8.0-inch touchscreen with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, rear AC vents, automatic climate control, and a wireless charger. However, there's a new grey upholstery for the seats, a revised instrument cluster with a 3.5-inch MID, and footwell lighting. One other aspect that has

Other than new upholstery, the new Nios features the same cabin as its predecessorsor

10 years separate the two, but the new Nios lives up to and betters its forebearer

"The Nios is, and has always been a leisurely drive, and quite an efficient one at that"

been updated is the safety kit — four airbags are standard across the Grand i10 Nios range, and top-spec versions also get two more airbags, cruise control, and a tyre pressure monitoring system.

The room and adjustability in the interior hasn't changed either, which isn't a bad thing. Four can sit quite comfortably, and the 260-litre boot can take at least one large suitcase and a couple of backpacks. There is ample space for two in the rear bench seat, but thigh support for the larger among us might be lacking, but only over long distances. Thanks to the height adjust for the driver's seat, finding the best driving position is simple, and the view out is quite good. Special mention needs to be made about the ORVMs — I've always been partial to these long units, and they really help visibility, though remember to pull them in (which can be done at a push of a button) when you're trying to squeeze through a narrow gap.

Mechanically, the Nios facelift is unchanged — you get the same

1.2-litre four-cylinder naturally aspirated mill that is rated at 82 bhp and 11.6 kgm of torque. A 5-speed AMT gearbox is an optional extra, and does add some convenience to the package. However, the 5-speed manual is spectacularly good, for this price point. Shifts are buttery smooth, and the lever slots into any gear with ease. The clutch bite point felt a little off, but that's been true across a range of new mass-market cars with a manual gearbox. It seems like every manufacturer is looking for that diesel-like 'just release the clutch and it'll move forward' approach. If you use the accelerator slightly, the engine will bog down and stall.

Once on the move, it's easy to see that most of the potential of this unit has been capped to the bottom end. Revving it above 4000 rpm (which is when peak torque comes in) is more or less a pointless endeavour — the revs rise, and so does the mildly pleasing engine note, but there isn't that much more forward movement. The Nios is, and has always been a leisurely drive, and quite an efficient one at that. It may not be Maruti Suzuki level, but just below that mark isn't a bad place to be. A point to also note is that Hyundai says the Nios is RDE compliant, which means there'll be no need for any mods once April 2023 rolls around.

Ride quality and handling are also the same as before. Most bad roads are taken care of exceedingly well (again for this price point), but that also means there's more than a decent amount of body roll when you push the Nios hard. The steering weighs up at speed, but there's no real feedback coming from the electrically-assisted unit. The disc-drum setup (and the ABS and traction control) do a good job of bringing the Nios to a halt effectively. It's too bad we're unlikely to see the resurgence of the 99-bhp 1.0-litre turbo-petrol engine with the Nios, but I would advocate for a Nios N Line, with sporty design bits, and that firecracker of a three-cylinder TGDi engine.

The model you see on these pages is the top-spec Nios Asta variant, with a manual gearbox, and it is priced at ₹ 7.93 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi. This means that other than the Maruti Suzuki Swift, the 2023 Nios is the most expensive hatchback in its segment. Still, considering the amount of features on offer, the space, and relative comfort, and the ease of driving, the new Grand i10 Nios is definitely worth looking at closely. It won't excite you, but it'll get the job done, and it won't break the bank while doing it either. I'm still hoping Hyundai India will surprise us with a Nios N Line, which will make it absolutely unique in its class. Fingers crossed. ■

AUTODATA

HYUNDAI GRAND i10 NIOS ASTA MT

POWERTRAIN	
Displacement	1197cc, I4, petrol
Max Power	82 bhp@6000 rpm
Max Torque	11.6 kgm@4000 rpm
Transmission	5MT
TYRES	
Type	175/60 R15
DIMENSIONS	
L/W/H (mm)	3815/1680/1520
Wheelbase	2450 mm
Fuel Capacity	37 litres
PRICE	₹ **7.93** LAKH, (ex-showroom, Delhi)

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Fun can be practical, too; the Mahindra Thar RWD rewrites the rules

As any self-respecting millennial will tell you, the Indian car market has come a long way. From just a handful of licence-produced models to what it is now: one of the widest range of cars, in a variety of shapes and sizes, and more importantly, tailor-made keeping the evolving Indian customer in mind. No hand-me-downs or outdated cars that were past their shelf life globally. We now get some of the best cars in the world, many of which are produced locally, and some even developed here. But to reach here, cars have become homogenous; their ability to stand out is generally down to a new engine choice or a superior list of features. We aren't too far from the day when it becomes extremely difficult to visually differentiate between cars from the same segment. Or maybe it's not as dystopian, especially with products like the Mahindra Thar around. It is the antithesis to the current market trend of making similar cars, its charm doesn't depend on a bunch of new features alone, it doesn't look like anything else on the market, and most importantly, it doesn't feel boring from behind the wheel. Plus now with the starting price of just Rs 9.99 lakh onwards, its appeal isn't limited to buyers in one segment alone!

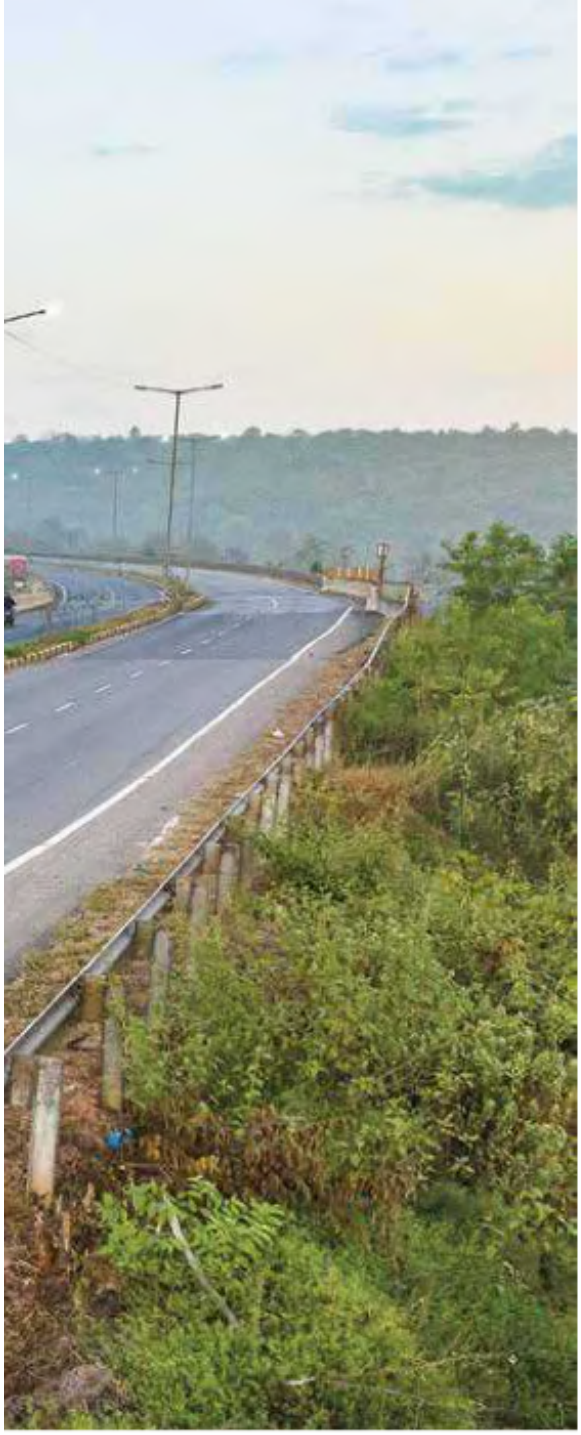
That's an astonishingly low price for something so well-built; so how did Mahindra manage that? Mahindra might

Mahindra
MH47TC09519

"The way the second-generation Thar has spread its wings and captured the market, it's unbelievable..."

have a global presence but it's Indian at heart, which allows it to keep value at the forefront of product planning — but to the point that it offers the most pocket-friendly cars without compromising even in the slightest way on the overall product quality. The Thar RWD is one great example of that. Realising that there's a demand for something very cool-looking, well-built, and most importantly, unique in the crossover SUV space, Mahindra has brought out the more road-focussed version of the Thar. It comes with a choice of two engines, both of which match and even surpass what's being offered elsewhere in the segment. Gearbox choices include a 6-speed automatic for the

The Thar RWD's interior looks and feels solid!



It'd feel special to own one of these, don't you think?

The Thar leads the way — as always!

petrol-engined Thar RWD and a 6-speed manual for the Thar RWD (diesel). The latter also benefits from a brake-locking differential, but in both cases, power is sent to the rear wheels. This means, the RWD application aside, mechanically too, this is nearly identical to the Thar 4x4.

This is reassuring as the Thar, launched in 2020, has managed to garner success like nothing else in the segment. The first-generation car enjoyed the looks and legacy of the older models (from the MMs to the venerable classics like the Mahindra Classic itself) but the way the second-generation model has spread its wings and captured the market, it's unbelievable. India is a price-conscious market and lifestyle-focussed products haven't been at the top of anyone's priority. Mahindra changed that, and with more than 80,000 customers, the new Thar not just registered a very cool 10x increase over the previous-generation model, but it did so while proving that the Indian market is ready for cars that are willing to step away from the norm. The Thar RWD is another definitive step in that direction.

For instance, if you look at the crossover SUVs available in the Rs 10 - 14 lakh segment, they do not just look similar, there's not much differentiating them in the way they drive. The Thar, on the other hand, makes its presence felt, regardless of the speed, driving surroundings, or even if it's being driven or not. The upright stance works as a great throwback to Mahindra's solid presence in this market segment but park it next to even the most radical design from 2022 (or '23), and it won't look out of place. The 18-inch wheels are the same as on the Thar 4x4, and with A/T tyres, these do give the Thar an imposing appearance. With the top in black, the effective dual-tone appearance of the Thar RWD makes the contrasting roofs of similarly priced crossovers look a bit forced in comparison. And then there's the line of accessories, the option to pick between hard top and soft top version, and of course, six really nice colours to choose from, including the new Everest White and Blazing Bronze.

We had the chance to take a brand-new Mahindra Thar RWD on an escapade in and around Goa to see how well it handles the one thing that's expected from a proper runabout in Goa: having fun. The Red Rage paint on it screams for attention, and it gets a lot of it, too. From the narrow roads in Assagao, the busy streets of Panjim, to the

negotiating stop-go traffic with absolute ease. The standard 6-speed automatic gearbox ensures that long drives in the city are trouble-free. And anyone who's hopped from one cafe to another in order to possibly try out every cuisine in one day (it's impossible as Goa has a lot to offer), moved between various beaches to find the best angle to enjoy the sunset, and putting their vehicle through the variety of roads (the abundance of great ones is balanced by the presence of absolutely knackered ones, too) would confirm it can be a hard day at work driving in Goa. But not for the Thar!

lush greenery of the Divar island, everything seemed to complement it. Car enthusiasts were quick to notice the trade plates, which meant they didn't wait before striking up a conversation, to have a sneak peek at what made this Thar different. Regulars in Goa would've heard of the radio spot that says "Thar is Goa's favourite SUV", and it's quite true. From owners who've scaled the length and breadth of the country for a quick holiday in Goa, adventure lovers, and even those looking to appreciate some laid-back driving on winding roads in and around the state, the Thar pleases all. The Thar RWD didn't disappoint us, either!

Its mStallion 150 T-GDI engine exhibits the tractability of an everyday urban car,

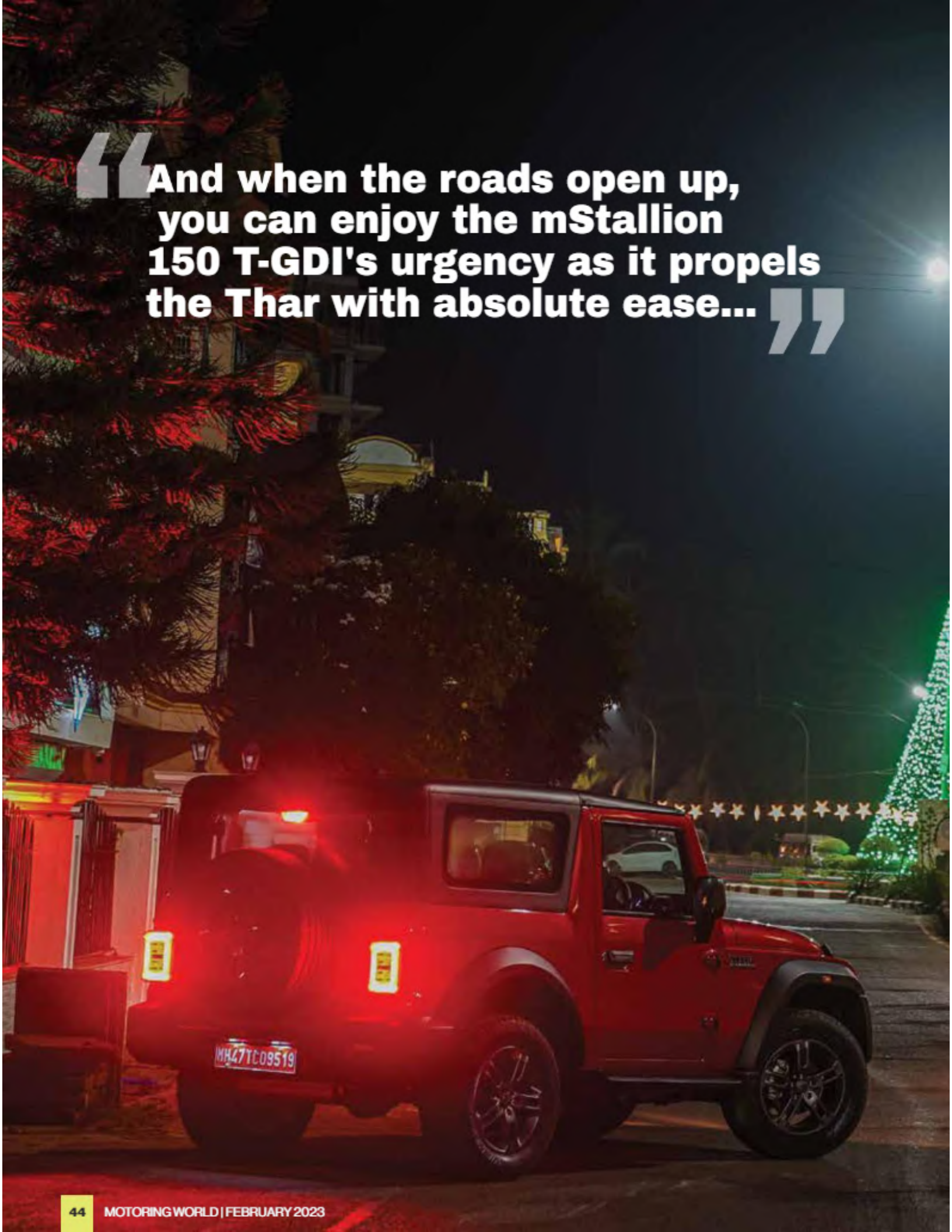
> **How's it on the move? Confident, energetic, and despite its size and stature, pretty stable, too**

And when the roads open up, you can enjoy the engine's urgency as it propels the Thar with absolute ease, thanks to 150 bhp of maximum power and 320 Nm of maximum torque available from as early as 1500 rpm.

But how is it on the move? Confident, energetic, and despite its size and stature, pretty stable, too. Its onboard ESP comes with rollover mitigation tech, dual airbags up front are standard, and so is ABS. Complying with the standard safety requirements, it must be reminded that the Thar also has a 4-star Global NCAP rating, validating the hard work that Mahindra engineers put in to make it safe. And unlike similar vehicles of the past, the Thar RWD comes with an inbuilt roll-cage, which further adds strength to the passenger shell. Aiding practicality and everyday use, the Thar RWD also comes with the ability to instal ISOFIX child seats to ensure that everyone, regardless of their age, is safe. Even if you aren't planning to take the Thar RWD off road, it's good to know that

Goa is full of bright and lively colours

You can never say no to mix bhaji and pav, and of course, Goan samosa!


"And when the roads open up, you can enjoy the mStallion 150 T-GDI's urgency as it propels the Thar with absolute ease..."
MH47TC09519

even the biggest craters won't be able to touch it. With a ground clearance of 226 mm and a 41.2-degree approach angle, the weirdest of ramps won't be a problem, either. This came in handy as we boarded our ferry from mainland Goa to Divar island. Last to leave the boat, the Thar RWD came out unperturbed, despite the vessel having moved a bit away from the ramp due to the flow of water. Or when we wanted to take a quick shot next to a local church only to find that the approach road to the parking was less of a road and more of a drainage channel.

A story in Goa is incomplete without recommendations, so here are some from us. Kefi Cafe and Bistro in Assagao serves delectable Lebanese and can't be missed. If you're in Panjim, drop in at Mr Baker for freshly baked stuff; the rum balls are our favourite. A stop at Cafe Bhonsle, which is about five minutes away, will let you enjoy a quick Goan snack without worrying about emptying your pocket. And a Veg/ Chicken Xacuti at O Coquiero will round up the day nicely. An early morning drive near the Verna Industrial area enabled us to get some nice drone shots of the Thar RWD while catching the last rays of the setting sun near Dona Paula was a great way to end an action-packed day. Driving around Goa, on roads good and bad, helped us appreciate the Thar RWD's ease of driving. The tall driving position is a boon when it comes to parking the SUV, too. No matter how long our day was, we could've easily gone for another few hundred km of driving, because we weren't tired at all. The takeaway here is that while our routine would've been nearly the same in a similarly priced crossover SUV but we wouldn't have had so much fun in it. And as we found out, the Thar is much easier to locate in a parking lot, too. So why buy mundane cars, when you get a Thar RWD instead?

ISSUE SPECIAL
MARUTI SUZUKI GRAND VITARA HYPERMILING

SIP-SLIDING AWAY

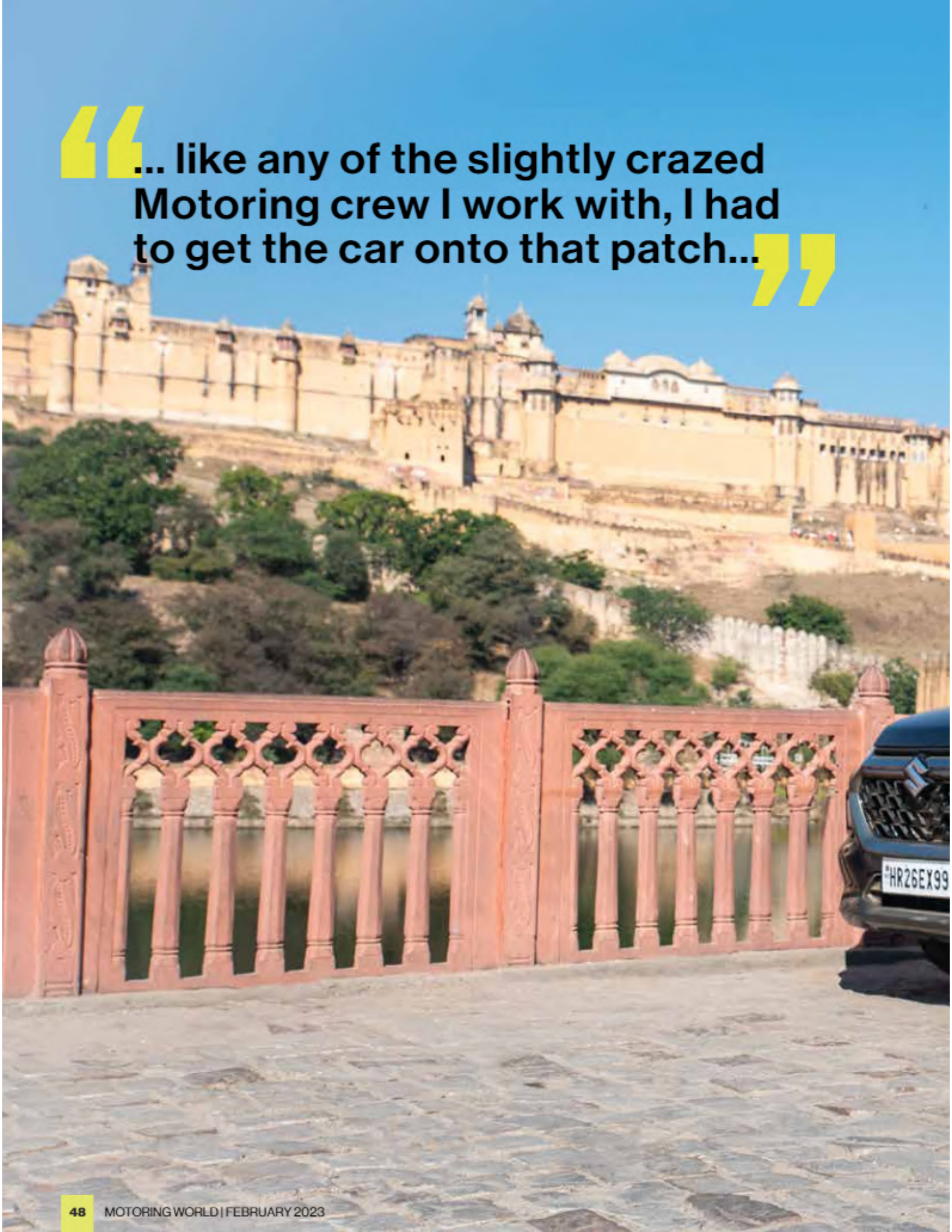
When you ask *kitna deti hai* and are blown away by the answer

By *Rivan RS* ***Photographs*** *Govind Gadekar*

The Maruti Suzuki Grand Vitara hybrid is India's most fuel-efficient car, at least based on ARAI ratings. That 27.97 kpl figure comes in ideal conditions, rarely replicated in the real world. So, what better way to get a real world figure than a long drive, say one from Delhi to Mumbai? Incidentally, it also happened to be my first — I'm not sure why, but a Mumbai to Delhi (or vice versa) drive has always been on my bucket list — and I wanted it to go swimmingly. It was a confluence of my own desires (an occurrence that seems to be getting rarer), as I really wanted to know how far the Grand Vitara could take me.

A shoot in the morning prevented us from leaving Manesar bright and early, which is generally considered the best time to leave for any road trip. Our first stop for the night was Jaipur considering we left well after lunch time, and it was a smooth four-and-a-half hour drive. We were just trying to get to our beds as soon as possible, as we had many miles to cover the next day, places we had planned to shoot at, and mileage to calculate. After some simple dhaba fare — by which I mean deliciously filled with butter and ghee — we retired for the night.

As we had covered just about 250 km the previous day, we wanted to jet out early, though that didn't seem on the cards either. I awoke the next day at a less than brisk pace (I had just attended the Hyundai GID 2022 that involved driving for about 2300 km, cumulatively, in less than a week), and then proceeded to eat a hearty breakfast, which meant that it wasn't particularly early before we actually set out. We managed to sneak the Grand Vitara (which was a bit of a task as the petrol engine was slightly noisy on a cold start) right up to the Amer Fort, just before the crowd came in, and then bustled off towards Nahargarh Biological Park.


"... like any of the slightly crazed Motoring crew I work with, I had to get the car onto that patch..."
HR26EX99

This wasn't just meant to be a sight-seeing trip though. Govind's sources had told of a road that went through it, and connected to Jaipur. It would be a bit of a detour, but the Grand Vitara seemed eager, and 550 km on the distance to empty was enough to assure me that we could go adventuring. Sadly, it was not to be. It seemed the park was closed for the day (we weren't able to ascertain why), so we then decided to hit up a back up spot I was very keen on — the salt flats near the Sambhar lake.

This detour would prove to be a much more worthwhile endeavour, and I got to actually test what the Grand Vitara's suspension was capable of handling. Some of those narrow village roads off the highway are in a state of perpetual disrepair, but the Maruti midsize SUV stayed quite sure-footed the entire way. After trudging along for quite a bit more than an hour, we were rewarded with a stunning vista — flat salt pans stretching out to the horizon, and a hint of the rather dry lake behind, all of it being baked by the relentless sun. Autumn may have been setting in some parts of India, but here, the sun rules all. Quite unlike the marchy, stinky salt pans I'm used to seeing on the Eastern side of Mumbai, these looked almost pristine white and brown, with the occasional bit of shrubbery dotted around.

And, like any of the slightly crazed *Motoring* crew I work with, I had to get the car onto that patch, as it would make for a thrilling shot. I had handbrake drifted the mild-hybrid petrol manual when I first drove the SUV, and thought I could replicate the feat with the hybrid, which, with this backdrop, would make for... well the shot you see above. To be honest, the Grand Vitara hybrid doesn't like that sort of driving, and even with the traction control system off, it was loath to perform the way its

A panoramic view of the alien landscape that is Kishangarh's marble slurry dumpyard, while sitting inside

Hybrid tech means the petrol engine mostly sips

HUD useful, but could be a long-term trouble spot

mild-hybrid sibling did. Still, it was a pretty enjoyable experience — sneaking onto the salt pans (you're generally not allowed), making some impressive doughnuts while trying to drift the car.

What that did result in, was the lowest mileage I had seen while driving the Grand Vitara, a measly 14 kpl! I thought my antics near the Sambhar lake and the attendant drive from, and back to, the highway might see that figure drop lower. We then headed to what we thought would be a coup de grace of the trip — the marble slurry dumpyard in Kishangarh. From the pictures we had researched, we had hoped it would look like the Grand Vitara was literally on a lunar (or at least alien) landscape. However, some bright spark with money and connections had also realised what a wonderful spot it makes for photography, and has been monetising it quite well. ₹ 5000 was asked for when we tried to get permission to shoot.

Both these detours — which didn't seem like much by themselves, but added more than the allocated hours to our trip — and the addition of minor mystery of the missing FASTag (it's an embarrassing tale of losing the tag in the door storage, getting a new one made, finding the old one that was now invalid, finding out the new one was invalid for some other reason, and getting a third one) meant that we weren't going to be able to power through and reach Mumbai very late on the same day.

Vowing to at least start the next day early, we settled in Udaipur for the night, having covered about 515 km. We fuelled up the Grand Vitara hybrid just the one time on the way, but to do the 13-and-a-half hour journey (about 745 km) from Udaipur to Mumbai meant that we'd stop early on, top up the tank, and then head on non-stop. So, we stopped at quite a picturesque petrol pump, which also had an unfortunate sign failure. Some of the lights had stopped working and the Rs 95.24 for diesel looked like a poorly drawn *swastika*. The sun came up as we filled up the tank,

"... was the lowest mileage I had seen while driving the Grand Vitara, a measly 14 kpl!"

“... could have been done in two days, and on just one refill of the 45-litre tank, but that wouldn’t have made for nearly as good a story now...”

and the distance to empty showed over 800 km — I wasn't worried about getting home at all.

However, time was of the essence. Other than two stops for food (one of which was a leisurely one at the amazing Hotel Ahura in Dahanu, which serves proper Parsi food, and has its own bakery), we sped on towards Mumbai. I came to know the Grand Vitara quite well, and they way the hybrid system functions. It tolerates rambunctious driving, but doesn't enable it in any way. There was a noticeable difference in mileage — almost 5 kpl — when cruising at speeds higher than 100 kph, when compared to those just below. This thing is tuned to get you to faraway places, but at an easy-going pace.

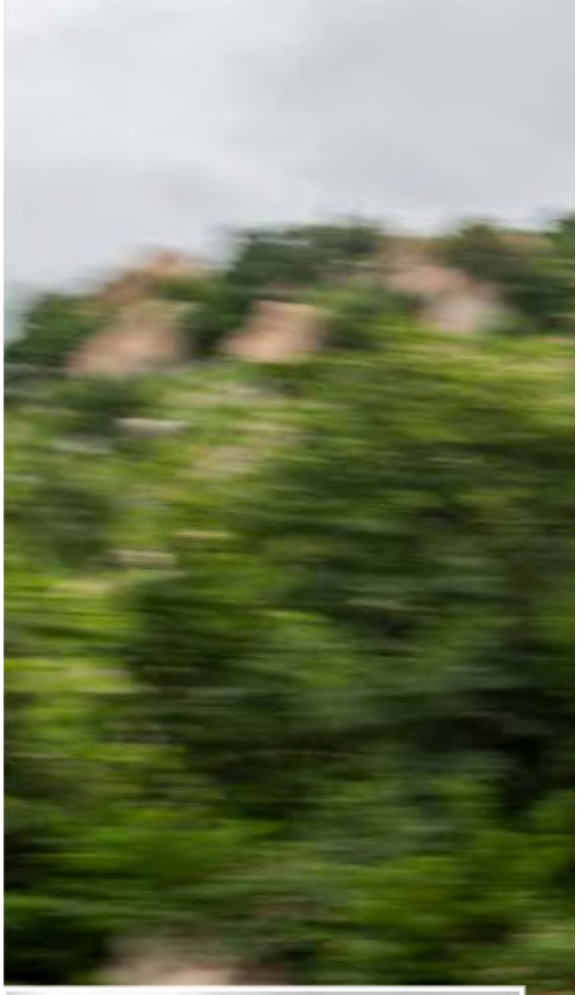
If you need to dart around slow-moving three-wheeler and truck traffic, then the Grand Vitara obliges with an initial burst of speed. Sustained pushing isn't this hybrid's strength, and if you drive it with that in mind, this SUV is quite an effortless cruiser. Body roll is well contained, the chassis feels taut, the suspension is just the right amount of soft to round out almost anything, and that hybrid is definitely the most frugal thing on the market. The 1500-km Delhi-Mumbai trip could have been done in two days, and on just one refill of the 45-litre tank, but that wouldn't have made for nearly as good a story now, don't you think?

The day ended with me safe (and very tired) at home, the Grand Vitara with over 120 km of range left, and the knowledge that if I had driven in a manner more attuned to Maruti's midsize SUV — gentle use of the accelerator and never going above 100 kph — I would have been rewarded with a mileage figure north of 20 kpl, quite easily. Add to that, the Vitara does a more than decent job of keeping you comfortable while mile-munching. Sure, that front seat could use a bit more lumbar support, that HUD seems on the flimsier side, and the cloth covering the sunroof is abysmal, but overall, I would highly recommend the Grand Vitara hybrid for those who need a marathon runner. ■

#BeTheBetterGuy
A Road Safety Initiative
HYUNDAI
Moving the world Together
A CSR initiative by Hyundai Motor India Foundation
Partnered By
MOTORING WORLD

ROAD SAFETY BEGINS WITH YOU

Unless you follow the rules, you won't be in a position to educate others about how to drive safely.



December 2022 was a good month right until the last hours of the year. For most of the month, we had been on various drives, with some nice cars, away from the bustle of city life. It seemed like the year would end on a high note. However, here we sit, astonished by the sheer lack of basic traffic sense in our country. In our line of work, we have become used to timing our drives so that we hit the highways very early in the morning. More than saving on time and enjoying the drive, we do this because we simply don't want to be part of the mess that appears when the roads are fully populated. In a nutshell, driving in India is not a safe thing to do, and to survive here, you need planning of an extremely high level, the reflexes of a pro athlete, and, preferably, an angel or two to make sure you reach home safely.

In 2020, a year that saw the country locked down for months due to the COVID-19 pandemic, India still managed to have the highest percentage of fatalities due to road accidents in the world. With over 3.6 lakh accidents, our shameful share was a staggering 11 per cent of the world total in 2020. We all know that these are only the reported numbers, and the actual figure will certainly be scarier. Also, being the world's youngest population invariably leads to the fact that the majority of road accident-related fatalities happen to 18-45-year-olds in India.

It is not that governments haven't tried instilling a better sense of road usage among the population. However, when road users are hell-bent on throwing caution out of the window, even the most proactive government won't be able to do much. Human life is unfortunately among the cheapest things in the country, and if we all take a good look at ourselves, we will find that it is because of us and our lax attitudes.

Take the last hours of 2022, for instance, or for that matter, any year. It's a time to celebrate, but you should do it in a way that doesn't put your own, or anyone else's life in danger. While going to pick up a friend from their place in order to head to a party, we came across at least six cars that were parked right at the edge of a blind spot of a turn, and this was all in a radius of barely 5 km. How will people ever think about fellow motorists on the road when they don't seem to care about their own safety and that of their vehicles? Your uncle being an MLA won't mend that dent or that broken tail-light, nor will it pay a hospital bill. We also found countless people riding their

"Hyundai's #BeTheBetterGuy road safety initiative continues to be the platform that gives our road safety concerns a wider reach"

two-wheelers haphazardly without helmets — from the left to the right, on the wrong side, in and out of narrow lanes. We get that they think their helmet comes in the way of a good Insta reel, but an autopsy report isn't a very good end result. We're not even getting into those who were holding their infants out of open sunroofs (a la The Lion King), taking selfies while driving, using their hazard lights randomly, honking their horns incessantly, tailgating, among many other such idiocies.

We love driving, that much is obvious. For us, it's much more than just being a job – it's a way of life, a passion. This is why it really bothers us when we see instances of irresponsible road behaviour, and why we keep imploring everyone to follow these simple and sensible driving habits.

- **Always wear your seat belt while driving, even when you are a passenger seated at the rear.**
- **Follow traffic rules and don't break the speed limit, even when no one is watching you.**
- **Never, ever, drink and drive. Be a responsible citizen, and take a cab home.**
- **Don't use your mobile phone while driving – eyes on the road, always.**
- **Let pedestrians cross the road first.**
- **Always give way to emergency service vehicles like ambulances and fire engines.**

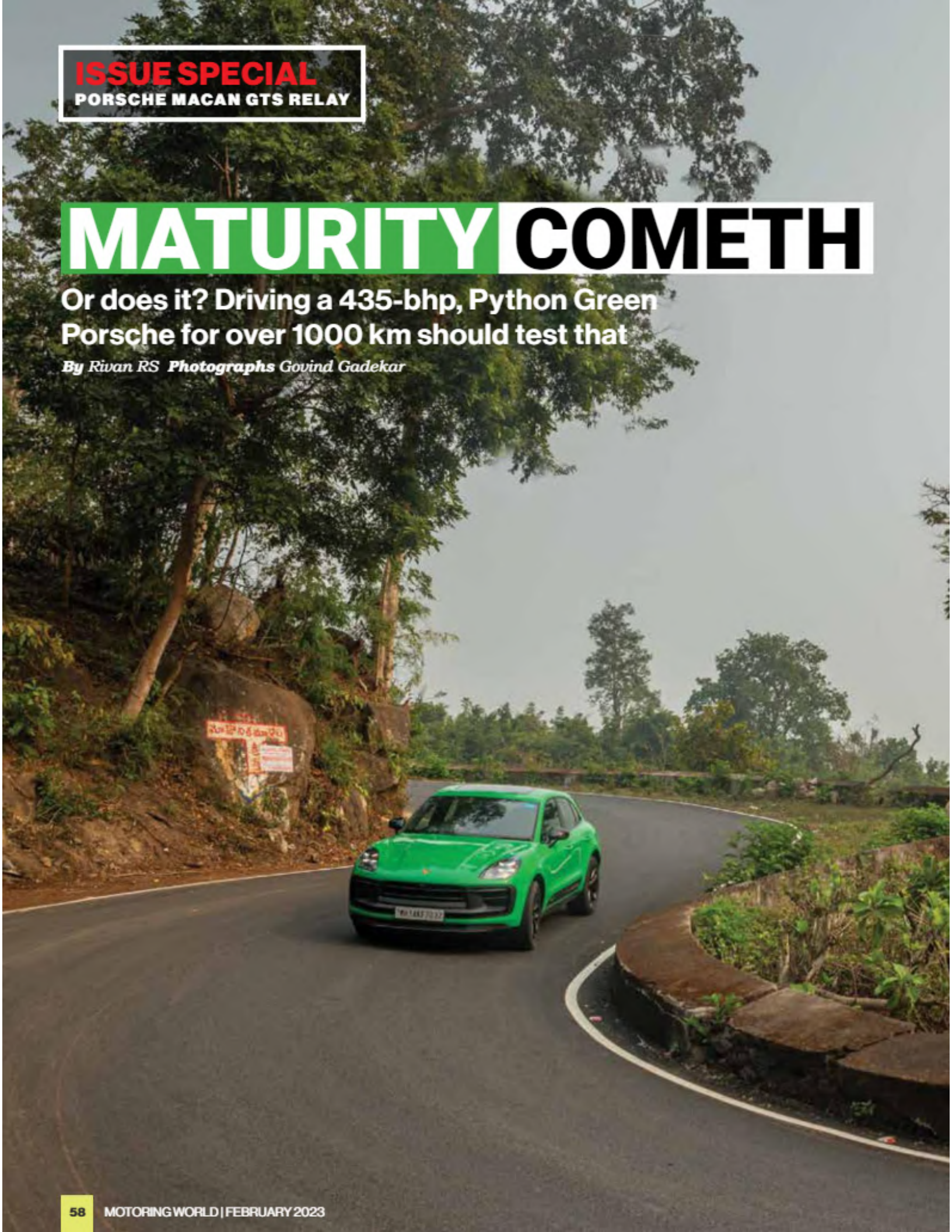
Our voices and concerns have a limited reach, though, and it's important to have the support of those who are in a position to amplify these messages. This is why we've been grateful to Hyundai and its #BeTheBetterGuy road safety initiatives over the years, which aim to bring about behavioural changes among Indian road users by emphasising that 'Safety Begins with You'. We support this initiative more and more with every passing year, because we've seen Hyundai's unshakeable commitment to it from up close. Consider this a request — please follow traffic rules, and help spread the word about road safety. #Bethebetterguy, in other words.

ISSUE SPECIAL
PORSCHE MACAN GTS RELAY

MATURITY COMETH

Or does it? Driving a 435-bhp, Python Green Porsche for over 1000 km should test that

By *Rivan RS* ***Photographs*** *Govind Gadekar*



It all began when Porsche India invited *Motoring* to be a part of its attempt to create the longest relay in the country, in a Macan GTS. A good number of our media fraternity obliged, and so did we — I almost dove on that grenade, so to speak, as the dates overlapped with the day I would be turning 34. The route that we had been assigned — Visakhapatnam to Kolkata — was also a region I had yet to explore. It was a confluence of too many desires that brought about me, getting into the amazingly comfortable bucket seats of a Python Green Macan GTS at 5:30 am, outside a hotel in Vizag, on my birthday!

There had been a great deal of planning that had gone into this. Govind and I had sat at a cafe for hours researching locations, timings of sunrise and sunset on the east coast, accessibility, and so on and so forth. Our first stop was going to be a beach we had scouted digitally and by hearsay — always ask the locals politely, and they're happy to help, especially if you're sitting in this gorgeous Macan GTS. We pulled up to the beach, and waited for the sun to come up.

It had been a while since I had seen the sun come up over water, and I had vivid memories of the first peaking of the sun turning the sea orange. As I fidgeted waiting for the sun to come up, I admired the Macan GTS. Yes, this Python Green paint job is a ₹ 4.92 lakh optional extra, but it looks absolutely stunning, and contrasts beautifully with the tasteful black highlights. Those 21-inch black alloys are also drool-worthy, and highlight the red brake calipers in an oh-so sporty manner. That black spoiler, the LED light bar, and the quad exhausts surrounded by what looks like carbon fibre (it's plastic)... it's all so eye-catching.

I'm a bit surprised that I'm a fan of this muscular, stretched 911 design — I wasn't a fan of it

Bamboo Chicken can be considered an acquired taste, unlike the sublime Porsche Macan GTS

Touch panels are easy to reach, fuss-free, and feel classy

> "... I soon realised that this car doesn't need mothering"

on the Panamera or the Cayenne — but on the Macan, it meets my traditionalist taste. I couldn't wait to see the orange light of the rising sun play with that lurid green finish, but the smog played spoilsport. It wasn't something I expected for some reason, but it dampened my spirits slightly. Still, I had 400-odd kilometres to travel today until our first stop in Chatrapur, Odisha, and it included a detour towards Araku Valley.

Based on our research — cobbled together from the locals, Google Maps, and Govind's network of friends (spread across the length and breath of this country) — I'd really be able to enjoy the Macan GTS on those twisty, winding, and sparsely populated roads. And boy did I! The standard Porsche Macan is quite a fun SUV. It's chuckable, has ample grip, and is enjoyable, to say the least. The Macan GTS ramps the enjoyment up by a factor of five. 0-100 kph in just over 4 seconds, 435 bhp and 56 kgm of torque always at your command, the lightning quick 7-speed dual-clutch gearbox, and that confidence-inspiring all-wheel

The Python Green exterior pack gets a matching interior

drive system work superbly to bring about what I can only describe as joy.

I was afraid those slim 40 aspect tyres and large rims would take a beating over the rougher patches, and I did restrain myself over them at first. But I soon realised that this car doesn't need mothering. It unequivocally has the go to match the show. Just as our stomachs started to rumble, intruding on the amazing drive we were having — the Macan GTS' size, power, and general adaptability can't be described by another word than sublime — Govind suggested we try some 'Bamboo Chicken'. A specialty of these parts the name is apt as you have chicken with some spices, roasted in a large bamboo shoot, over a wood or coal fire.

A little wary of undercooked chicken, I nibbled at it, but found it to be surprisingly flavourful — the overt hints of bamboo and pepper came through well. 'It's definitely something I'd have again,' I thought to myself. A full belly and a warmed seat (we were in a hilly enough region and it was early enough that we didn't miss ventilated seats) usually means sleep can set in, and that held true for Govind in the passenger seat. That gave me some alone time with the Macan GTS, and we got to know each other quite well.

It was always eager, and it liked to make itself known. The Python Green finish is something that only catches the eye when it comes within sight. The exhaust note when Sport mode is engaged lets everyone know it's coming around the corner. And it goes around a corner so well — the superb AWD system distributes power instantly, and only if you switch the nannies

Despite the low profile tyres, the Macan GTS doesn't shy away from the going off the beaten path

The Macan GTS was a breeze to drive on the narrow Kolkata lanes that led to Porsche workshop

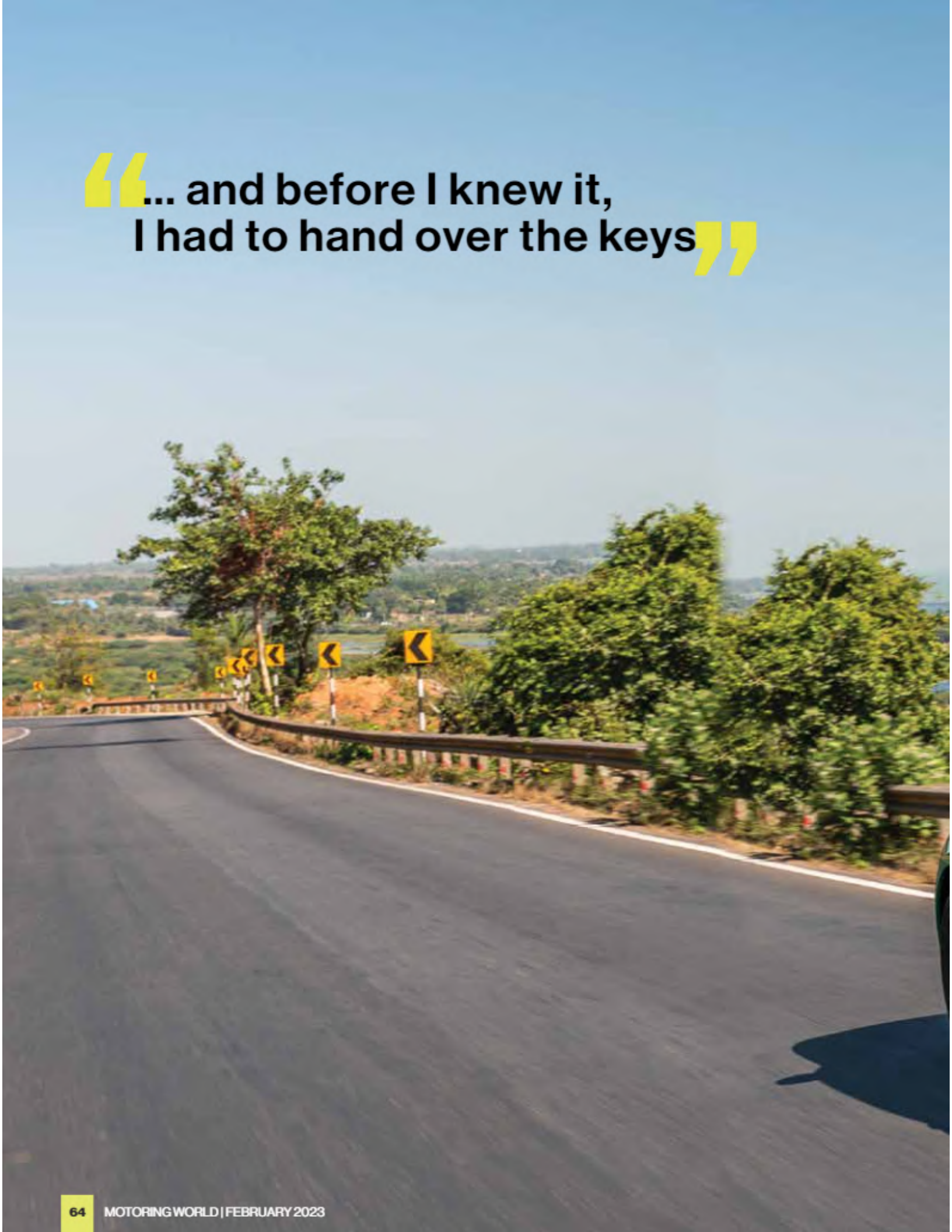
off, will it allow you to misbehave. I was on a public road, so I kept that little devil on my shoulder in check. But, even in the 40-80 kph range, the Macan GTS was definitely an eye-opener to drive.

It was an easy cruise after we joined the NH-16, which would lead us to Kolkata. It's a well-maintained six (mostly six, sometimes four) lane, tolled highway (no exceptions for those without FASTags), with a speed limit that varies between 80 kph and 100 kph. Google Maps showed a number of forest reserves, sanctuaries and such along the way, but the foliage seemed too dense to risk the Macan GTS, even with its AWD system and a dedicated off-road mode. That terrain seemed daunting even if I were in a Defender. As the sun began to set, we set our sights on getting to Chatrapur, our stop for the night.

By the time we had stopped, it was well after dark, and other than a lingering, loving look at the Macan GTS, I trudged to the hotel room, and conked off for the night after a morsel. We were up early enough to catch the sun as it rose over Tampara lake, and as I moved the SUV into position, I noticed something on the clear MID on the right side instrument cluster pod. It was showing me I had been driving rather efficiently the previous day, despite some, frankly, boisterous antics to get a drift shot. This 2.9-litre V6 was going over 10 km on a litre of fuel. Now, that's not bad at all!

Most of my second day with the Macan GTS involved setting off on rather random roads that trailed off the NH16, in order to get that perfect shot of the Porsche on a narrow strip of land — with the Chilika lake on one side, and the

> **“This 2.9-litre V6 was going over 10 km on a litre of fuel”**



"... and before I knew it, I had to hand over the keys"

Bay of Bengal on the other. However, despite a particularly promising lead, one that saw the SUV happily chug along a rutted trail, that saw us cross the train line (incidentally, if you're travelling from Vizag to Kolkata by train, there's actually a spot marked on Google Maps where you can see just that) there was no access for a four-wheeler.

After more than a few hours spent rather fruitlessly, we decided to call it an early day and head to Bhubaneswar. After all, we had about 450 km to cover the next day, and some of it was through Kolkata traffic, which I had heard disturbing tales of. In fact, our flight back to Mumbai was at 9:40 pm, and we thought an extremely early start was in order, which helped our case to head in early. As was the case whenever we entered an urban centre, the Macan GTS turned heads. I kept the switchable exhaust on the muted setting at those points, but there was still no shortage of admirers.

It seemed like we had underestimated the quality of the road, and just how easily the Macan GTS can make up ground. It cruised comfortably, weaved in and out of truck traffic with supreme ease, and kept me quite entertained throughout the journey. Everything in there is built to provide the thrill of driving, and boy does it all work so well. Even the occasional four-legged pedestrian and some of the more dim-witted two-legged ones, couldn't raise a hairy moment, and I have to make special mention of the superb Bose audio system, which is unfortunately a ₹ 2.45 lakh extra.

We reached Kolkata well before we had planned — we even managed to get one shot of the lovely green Macan GTS highlighted against one of Kolkata's iconic yellow taxis — and before I knew it, I had to hand over the keys. It almost took more willpower than I had to do that, and I walked away feeling that usual melancholy, when something good ends. I guess I'm mature enough to now know that nothing good lasts forever, and it shouldn't. Otherwise, how would we know the difference between a good time and a bad one? I do know one thing, though, and that is that through whatever times, the Macan GTS is the best of companions. Maybe I'll ask to do the entire run of the relay by myself next time. ■

ICOTY 2023

AND THE WINNERS ARE...

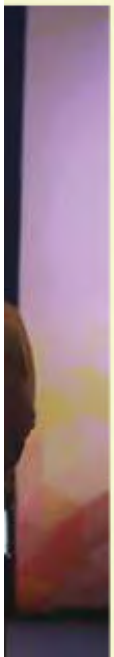
The prestigious Indian Car of the Year Awards 2023 sees the rise of new winners among strong contenders

The winners of the coveted 18th Indian Car of the Year (ICOTY), the 5th Premium Car Award by ICOTY and the 3rd Green Car Award by ICOTY were announced in Delhi on the 12th of January, 2023.

The ICOTY awards held under the aegis of the Automotive Journalists Association of India (AJAI) are the most coveted automotive awards in the country and are often referred to as the Oscars of the Indian automotive industry. The award is an expert and independent judgment of the best new car. The highly experienced jury members are responsible for selecting a single decisive winner, and the criteria like price, fuel efficiency, styling, comfort, safety, performance, practicality, technical innovation, value for money, and suitability for Indian driving conditions are particularly important factors that are considered while deciding on the winner.

The 2023 ICOTY is the Kia Carens, while Mercedes-Benz took

2023
Indian Motorcycle of the Year
JK TYRE
Presents



Deloitte
WINNER

the Premium Car Award for its EQS 580 and the Kia EV6 was declared the 2023 Green Car of the Year.

The Kia Carens had competition from the likes of the Hyundai Tucson, Toyota Urban Cruiser HyRyder, Mahindra Scorpio-N, Maruti Suzuki Brezza and Grand Vitara, Skoda Slavia, Volkswagen Virtus and Citroen C3. These were the finalists that the jury shortlisted and picked from, and the Carens fought them all off.

For the second time running, Mercedes-Benz took home the Premium Car Award for the new EQS 580. The Premium Car Award takes into consideration all premium, performance and luxury cars that sit above the ₹ 40-lakh mark, including both locally produced as well as imported car models. The BMW i4 and the BMW iX were runners-up in the Premium Car category.

Kia scored a double bonanza for 2023 and took home the 3rd Green Car Award by ICOTY for the EV6. The Green Car Award takes into consideration all hybrid and electric vehicles currently available in the Indian market. The Kia EV6 pipped the Tata Tiago EV and the Maruti Suzuki Grand Vitara to claim the top spot on the podium.

Dr Raghupati Singhania, Chairman & Managing Director, JK Tyre & Industries Limited, said, 'I would like to congratulate all the winners for making the best in the segment and honouring the excellence in the automotive

"The key criteria for an ICOTY winner is its power to redefine the segment..."

industry. ICOTY and IMOTY are the most integral part of the Indian auto industry as they bring innovation to the industry. The foundation of JK Tyre stands for innovation, development, growth, technology, and transparency and these awards are the testimony of brilliance. I am sure it has been a rewarding and successful journey for everyone and this will continue to be so for years ahead. These awards motivate us all to come together and make the Indian Auto Industry renowned globally.'

The ICOTY awards were instituted in 2005, and are among the top 5 automotive awards in the world. They are adjudged by a jury of experts from India's best automobile media and are by far the most coveted automobile awards in the country. These awards have been sponsored by JK Tyre ever since their inception.

The ICOTY awards 2021 are adjudged by a highly experienced group of jurors from the top automotive media in India. They are Dhruv Behl, Ishan Raghava (AutoX), Dhruv Saxena, Abhik Das (Auto Today), Aspi Bhathena, Jim G. (Car/Bike India), Sirish Chandran, Aatish Mishra (Evo India), Pablo Chaterji, Kartik Ware (Motoring World), Bertrand D'souza, Bob Rupani (Overdrive), Muralidhar Swaminathan (The Hindu Business Line), Abhay Verma (Turbocharged), Ameya Dandekar (CarDekho), Girish Karkera (Times Auto), Kushan Mitra (The Print) and Kranti Sambhav (Times Drive). ■

AND THE WINNER IS...

Another laurel in the bag for Royal Enfield as the Hunter 350 reigns victorious

The winner of the 16th Indian Motorcycle of the Year (IMOTY) award was announced last month in Delhi. The award takes into consideration the criteria like price, fuel efficiency, styling, comfort, safety, performance, practicality, technical innovation, value for money, and suitability for Indian driving conditions to select the winner.

The Royal Enfield Hunter was crowned Indian Motorcycle of the Year award for 2023. For the crown, it faced off against the TVS Ronin, Suzuki V-Strom SX, KTM RC 390, Bajaj Pulsar N160, Yezdi Adventure and Yezdi Scrambler, Honda CB300F, Triumph Tiger 660 and the BMW G 310 RR. In total, there were 10 motorcycles that were shortlisted by the jury, before the final winner was selected after the jury round.

The IMOTY awards 2021 were adjudged by Rahul Ghosh, Dipayan Dutta (Auto Today), Shivank Bhatt, Dhruv Paliwal (AutoX), Aspi Bhathena, Joshua Varghese (Bike India), Sirish Chandran, Aatish Mishra (Evo India), Kartik Ware, Janak Sorap (Motoring World), Bertrand D'souza, Rohit Paradkar (Overdrive), Pratheek Kunder (BikeWale), Abhay Verma (Turbocharged) and Kranti Sambhav (Times Drive).

IMOTY is known as the most credible and coveted Indian two-wheeler award, with JK Tyre as a proud sponsor of the grand award ceremonies right from its inception back in 2007. ■

AUTO EXPO 2023

Here are the most notable reveals and launches from manufacturers at the 16th Auto Expo

BYD SEAL

BYD will soon launch the Seal, an all-electric sedan, in India. The BYD Seal is the first vehicle to use the brand's CTB (cell-to-body) technology, which integrates the battery into the body. It is outfitted with BYD's first-generation EV platform (e-Platform 3.0) and the Blade Battery. The car can accelerate from 0 to 100 kph in 3.8 seconds, and has an electric range of up to 700 km on a single charge, thanks to a drag coefficient of only 0.219 Cd.

HYUNDAI IONIQ 5

Priced at ₹ 44.95 lakh, ex-showroom, the Ioniq 5 is Hyundai India's first EV to be based on the dedicated BEV platform called E-GMP. This SUV is powered by a 72.6-kWh battery pack with an ARAI range of 631 km, and an electric motor that produces 215 bhp and 35.7 kgm.

KIA CONCEPT EV9

Kia India's showing that it's quite serious about its all-electric future by showcasing the Concept EV9. Displaying the Korean company's push for sustainability, Kia says they were inspired by nature. The Concept EV9 uses upcycled materials developed from waste deposited into marine ecosystems. Featuring the brand's new Opposites United design language, it manages to hide its rather large dimensions quite well. It's underpinned by the same E-GMP (Electric Global Modular Platform) that is used by the EV6 that's already on sale in India.

KIA KA4

Even if Kia wants to call it an RV (recreational vehicle), the KA4 is more akin to the next-gen Carnival. This MPV definitely has some SUV design cues, but not enough of them to hide the overall people-mover shape. Kia claims best-in-class passenger and cargo space thanks to the sliding and folding second row of captain's seats. It also sports a comprehensive list of Level 2 autonomous driving assistance tech, and plenty of connectivity and convenience features.

LEXUS LM

This ultra-luxury MPV may share a lot with the Toyota Vellfire, but it looks unique, and very much like every other Lexus on sale. The Japanese luxury brand will announce prices for the LM 300h in India before the year is out. The 215-bhp petrol-electric powertrain, which powers all-four wheels thanks to an electric motor on each axle, is shared with the Vellfire, as is the platform, though the interior is definitely plusher than the Toyota.

LEXUS RX

Lexus has announced bookings have opened for its large RX SUV. Prices will be revealed by March, and deliveries are scheduled to begin by June this year. There are two variants of the RX on offer — the comfort-oriented RX 350h Luxury, and the sportier RX 500h F Sport Performance. The former shares its powertrain with the LM 300h, Vellfire, and NX 350h, but is tuned to a higher 244 bhp state of tune. Along with visual cues that tell you this is the faster version, the latter also gets a 2.4-litre turbo-petrol engine and an electric motor, making a combined 361 bhp and 46.9 kgm of torque. Expect it to be priced higher than the likes of the Audi Q5, Mercedes-Benz GLC, and BMW X3.

MARUTI SUZUKI EVX

Maruti Suzuki has finally showcased an EV for India, and it's coming to a showroom near you in the next two years. The eVX concept SUV has a 60-kWh battery pack offering up to 550 km of range on a single charge, though no power figures have been revealed yet. The concept looks decidedly, well, concept-like, with sharp creases, and well-defined musculature adorning its upright stance. When it does arrive, the production version of the eVX will rival the likes of the MG ZS EV, Mahindra XUV400, Tata Nexon EV Max, and Hyundai Kona Electric.

MG4 EV

The MG4 EV gets two powertrain options — a 168-bhp powertrain paired with a 51-kWh battery, or a 201-bhp option paired with a 64-kWh battery pack. Both send power to the rear wheels, with the 201-bhp MG4 variant capable of a 0-100-kph sprint in under 8 seconds, and a top speed of 160 kph. As for range, the MG4 is capable of WTLP-claimed 350 km (51 kWh) and 450 km (64 kWh) of range on a single charge.

MG HECTOR FACELIFT

The Hector facelift comes in five different models — Style, Smart, Smart Pro, Sharp Pro, and Savvy Pro, with prices starting from ₹ 14.73 lakh, all the way up to ₹ 21.73 lakh (all prices, ex-showroom). It receives a new dual-tone interior, an updated dashboard with revised air-conditioning vents and a 14-inch portrait touchscreen infotainment system in the centre. The switchgear on the centre console and the gear lever has also been updated. The Level 2 Advanced Driver Assistance System (ADAS) is the most noticeable addition to the feature list, and it includes lane keep assist, frontal collision warning, emergency braking, adaptive cruise control, traffic jam assist, and high beam assist.

MG EHS PLUG-IN HYBRID

The MG eHS Plug-in Hybrid is certainly the best of both worlds. It combines efficiency and performance. The driving system includes an electric motor, a battery pack, and a strong petrol engine that work in tandem to maximise efficiency, power, and range. The hybrid engine has a combined power output of 254 bhp, allowing it to accelerate from 0-100 kph in 6.9 seconds.

TATA CURVV

That's the Tata Curvv, and it does seem like it's production ready. It's such a design that you'll either love or hate it. We definitely love how this one looks in person. The Curvv is powered by a 123-bhp 1.2-litre, three-cylinder turbo GDi petrol engine and produces 22.94 kgm of torque.

TATA HARRIER EV

The Harrier will soon have an all-electric version on sale, and the best part is that it'll have all-wheel drive, too. There's no information yet about the size of the battery pack or the outputs of the motors, but what we do know is that Tata has made the most of the Land Rover-derived platform. Other than the new 'Empowering White' body paint, an EV badge on the front fender, and a slightly redesigned grille, there really isn't much to differentiate the Harrier EV and the standard model.

TATA SIERRA EV

The near-production version of the all-new Tata Sierra was showcased at Auto Expo 2023, and it's expected to go on sale before the end of 2024. There's not much that has changed from the concept that was on display at the previous iteration of the Auto Expo, and based on Tata's penchant for bringing near-production models to the showroom almost as is, there isn't much more that's going to change. Let's hope the new model lives up to the iconic nameplate.

MARUTI SUZUKI FRONX

The Fronx is essentially a Baleno-based cross-hatch. In this shade of Nexa Blue, it is quite the looker! The styling borrowed from the Grand Vitara is gracefully integrated into the Baleno's shape, and it looks like a muscular hatchback. It'll be available with an 87-bhp 1.2-litre petrol engine (with MT and AMT options) and a 99-bhp 1.0-litre turbo-petrol engine (with MT and AT options). Considering the 99-bhp turbo-petrol cross-hatch weighs a mite over a tonne, the Fronx should be a quick and fun machine. It's also lovely that Maruti has opted to bring the excellent Boosterjet engine back to the market. While prices will overlap with the Brezza, it'll be retailed from the premium Nexa outlets and target a different buyer.

MG EUNIQ 7

The MG Euniq 7 is a hydrogen fuel-cell MPV. It is outfitted with a third-generation fuel-cell technology known as the PROME P390, which offers features such as an integrated design, high power density, longevity, reliability, and outstanding environmental adaptation. With a system output of 92 kW (123 bhp), MG says that this world-leading fuel cell technology adheres to the strictest safety regulations and performs well across key performance characteristics such as comfort, fuel economy, and service life. In an MPV as large as the Euniq 7, we're sure that it'll be comfortable. Another good thing about the fuel-cell system is that it is applicable to passenger vehicles, city buses, medium and large trucks, and other vehicle platforms, too.

MARUTI SUZUKI JIMNY FIVE-DOOR

The long-awaited Jimny five-door boasts of that boxy yet adorable design. There will be two variants on offer — Zeta and Alpha — and will have features such as automated LED headlamps, electronic ORVMs, automatic climate control, and cruise control. In addition, the SUV has six airbags, ABS with EBD, ESP, Hill Hold Control, Hill Descent Control, a rearview camera, and a brake-limited slip differential.

The Jimny five-door has a length of 3985 mm, a width of 1645 mm, a height of 1720 mm, and a wheelbase of 2590 mm. Plus, it comes with a ground clearance of 210 mm. It appears to be well-proportioned, with short front and rear overhangs, and approach and departure angles of 30 and 50 degrees, respectively. It features a 103-bhp 1.5-litre petrol engine, 4-speed AT, 4×4 tech, and a lot more. Inside, it sports a three-spoke steering wheel and a standard twin-pod analogue instrument cluster. A 9-inch touchscreen infotainment system with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay compatibility is housed in the centre console. Expect prices in the ₹ 10-15 lakh, ex-showroom range.

TORK KRATOS X

Based on the existing Kratos R, Pune-based electric two-wheeler brand, Tork Motors, unveiled its new electric motorcycle, the Kratos X. Tork has tuned the bike for higher torque in order to deliver quicker acceleration, a new instrument console that besides additional features is bigger in size and is touchscreen-enabled. Furthermore, on the mechanical front, the Kratos X comes with a new aluminium swingarm and is equipped with fast charging.

MATTER CONCEPT EXE

Electric two-wheeler manufacturer Matter unveiled the Concept EXE which is based on the principle of aspirational future tech, according to Matter. The concept bike features battery-swapping technology for a long range. It has a progressive design and connectivity that creates smart experiences that will drive the significant shift to EV adoption while being cost-effective to run and maintain.

MATTER CONCEPT UT

The Matter Concept UT features a more understated styling and a minimalistic front fascia and bodywork. The concept bike has been designed keeping delivery activities in mind, as it is equipped with panniers on its tail and on either side. The UT also comes with battery-swapping technology and connected features.

KEEWAY SR250

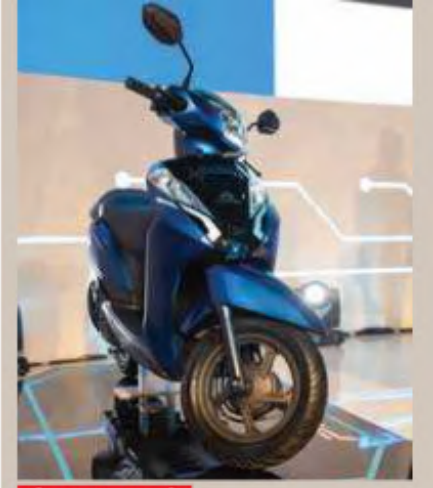
Keeway launched the new SR250 at ₹ 1.49 lakh (Ex-showroom, Delhi), which will be the Hungarian brand's 8th product offering in the Indian market. The 'Big-brother' of the SR125 showcases classic retro design elements while also providing modern-day features, making it a decent Neo-Retro offering for urban commuting from the manufacturer. The Keeway SR250 will appeal to someone looking for a minimalistic design packed with Retro appeal. Available in 3 colours, namely Glossy White, Glossy Red and Glossy Black, deliveries and test rides will start from April 2023 onwards, through authorised Benelli-Keeway dealerships.

JOY E-BIKE MIHOS

Made up of a unique material named Poly Dicyclopentadiene or PDCPD, the Mihos electric scooter supports supercharging in four hours, has a digital speedometer, and more. The vehicle can also be connected with the Joy app which will give all the updates about the e-scooter. It is available in three colours, namely Metallic Blue, Pearl white, and Glossy Yellow. For the first 500 buyers, the scooter will be priced at ₹ 1.49 lakhs (all-inclusive).

MBP C1002V

The C1002V cruiser packs a 997cc liquid-cooled V-twin mill making about 94 bhp. It gets an aluminium alloy frame, belt drive technology, projector LED lights, and a 5-inch full-colour TFT screen. The bike also gets KYB suspension and dual-channel ABS. It further comes with IoT (Internet of Things) connectivity, giving the rider access to a whole bunch of features including a remote shutdown, panic button, trip history, and telemetry, among other things.



GREAVES COTTON- AMPERE EV

Greaves Cotton unveiled its new high-speed e-scooter, the Ampere Primus at the Auto Expo 2023. Targeted at modern millennial commuters and young families, it offers a claimed top speed of 77kph and 100+ km of true range. The bookings for the Ampere Primus electric scooter are open as of now.

ULTRAVIOLETTE-F99 FACTORY RACING PLATFORM

Ultraviolette announced its foray into the world of high-speed racing with the unveiling of the F99 Factory Racing platform. The F99 is all set to break all barriers when it comes to electric motorsports in the two-wheeler segment with a 200 kph top speed and 65 bhp of peak power, along with other adaptations to deliver class-leading performance. Engineered to output maximum power from the powertrain while ensuring all necessary safety checks, it will be something to look forward to.

MBP M502N

The MBP M502N is a 486cc, twin-cylinder naked bike that churns out 50 bhp with J Juan brakes, KYB suspension, light-sensitive LED projectors and backlit handlebar controls. It also gets IoT (Internet of Things) connectivity as standard. MBP(Moto Bologna Passione) bikes are to be sold through Benelli and Keeway dealerships in India, under the Adishwar Auto Ride umbrella.

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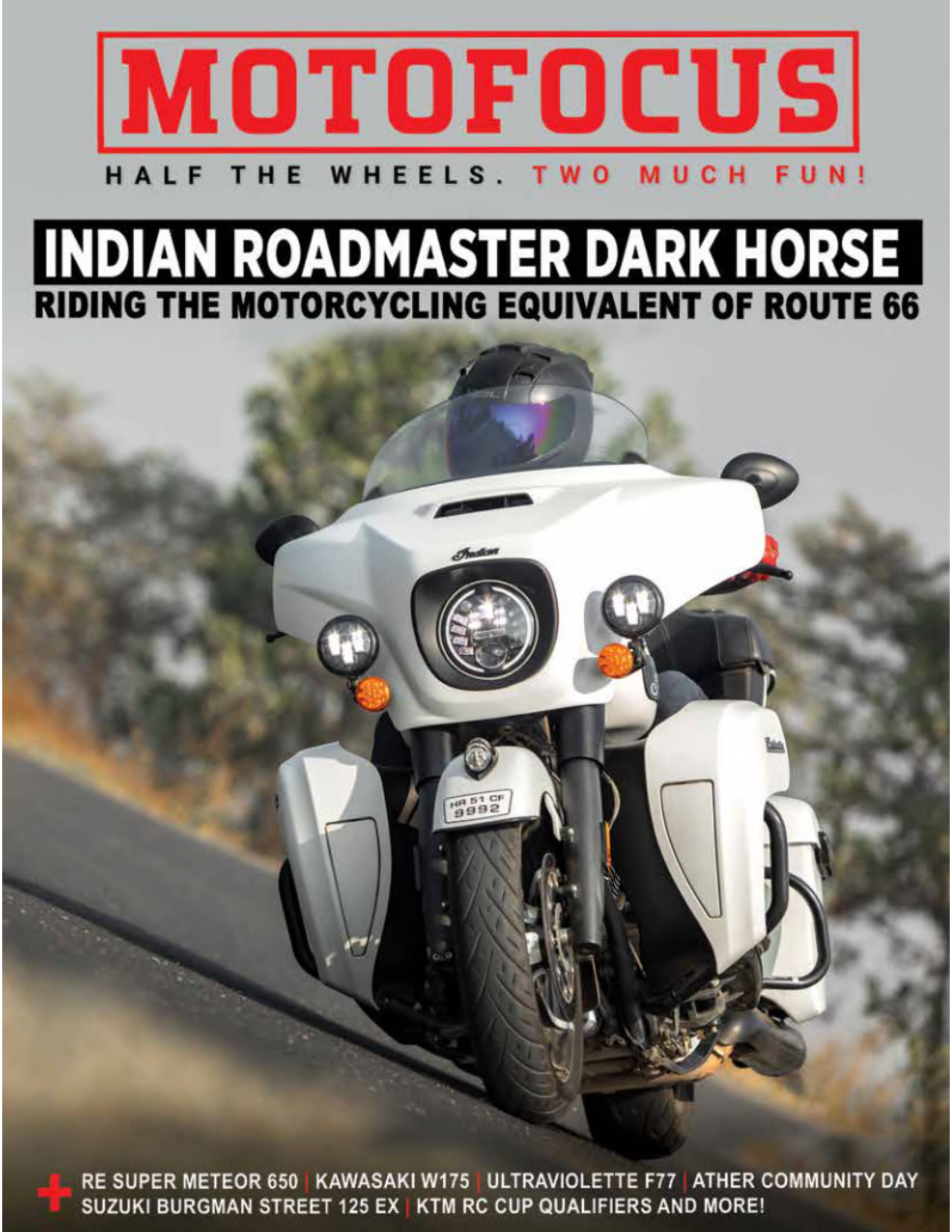

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Where?
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Sena 50S Harman Kardon Bluetooth Communication System

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Is it any good?
The 50S offers an all-new experience of Riding Connected, now with sound by Harman Kardon. The 50S features Sena's Mesh Intercom, which brings significant advancements to motorcycle communication. With an exceptional communication network and finely-tuned speakers and microphones, the 50S continues the goal of keeping riders connected on their journey. The Sena 50S Harman Kardon is fully waterproof with IP65 certification, and further includes voice-activated digital assistant access.

How much?
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Where?
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Cardo Freecom 4X Bluetooth Communication System

What is it?
Bluetooth communicator with sound by JBL, a Live Intercom function, Natural Voice Operation, and other features.
Is it any good?
The Cardo Freecom 4X is a rider-to-rider communicator with a 1200-m range. It also comes with the addition of an IP67 waterproof certification, jog-dial, and over-the-air software updates. It has 40-mm HD JBL speakers with JBL sound profiles, USB Type-C connectivity, Bluetooth 5.2, 13 hours of conversation time with quick charging, an FM radio, and a two-year warranty. It can automatically adjust your sound volume based on the outside ambient noise and can connect with any other Bluetooth headset of any brand.

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Cardo Packtalk Edge Bluetooth Communication System

What is it?
A streamlined, powerful, and user-friendly Bluetooth communication device with top-end features.
Is it any good?
The Cardo Packtalk Edge features a slimmer design, an integrated antenna, and a matte grey finish. It comes with improved Natural Voice Operation, a magnetic air mount, and second-generation Dynamic Mesh Communication that pairs quickly and produces pristine intercom sound, among other new and improved features. JBL also includes an upgraded noise-filtering microphone and better speaker clarity with it. It also features Bluetooth 5.2 and up to 13 hours of talk time with a 10-day standby.
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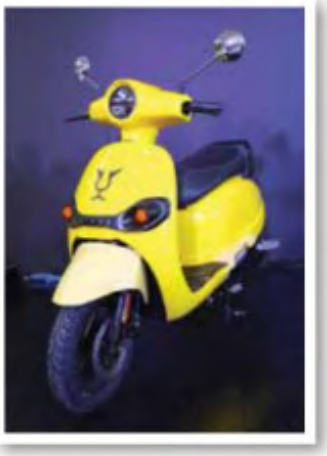
THE GRAPEVINE

SHOOTING STAR

Royal Enfield has launched the Super Meteor 650 in India in three variants, namely Astral, Interstellar and Celestial, with prices starting from ₹ 3.48 lakh (ex-showroom). The third model based on the 650cc platform from Royal Enfield, the Super Meteor 650 also shares its underpinnings with the Interceptor 650 and the Continental GT 650. The bike features a circular LED headlamp and a windscreen, a classic teardrop-shaped fuel tank, a stepped seat and dual chrome exhausts. The Super Meteor also gets Royal Enfield's Tripper Navigation system. This is integrated into a twin-pod instrument console. It also offers Bluetooth connectivity and a USB charging port as well. The Super Meteor 650 is powered by a 648cc, parallel-twin engine. It has been tuned to produce 46.2 bhp at 7250 rpm, and 5.3 kgm of torque at 5650 rpm. This unit comes with a 6-speed gearbox and a slip-and-assist clutch. It also gets a 43 mm upside-down fork suspension setup up front, which is a first for Royal Enfield. It will be available in Astral Black, Astral Blue, Astral Green, Interstellar Grey, Interstellar Green, Celestial Red and Celestial Blue colour schemes.

INDESTRUCTIBLE JOY

WardWizard, manufacturer of the electric two-wheeler brand 'Joy e-bike', announced the commencement of online bookings for its new high-speed electric scooter Mihos. Customers can book the Mihos free of cost from the company's website as well as from all authorised showrooms across the country. The deliveries of Mihos will begin in March 2023 in a phased manner. Launched at the Auto Expo 2023 for ₹ 1.49 lakh (ex-showroom, Pan India for first 500 customers), Mihos is designed and developed with Poly-DiCycloPentadiene (PDCPD) for additional durability and flexibility to absorb maximum impact on the road. It features a 74V 40Ah Lithium-Ion based battery with Nickel Manganese Cobalt chemistry having a net energy content of 2.5 kWh, along with a hub motor direct drive transmission combined with a BLDC motor. The Mihos electric scooter supports supercharging in four hours, has a digital speedometer, and more. The vehicle can also be connected with the Joy app which will give all the updates about the e-scooter. The Smart Mihos E-scooter comes with a combination of different sensors imparting intelligent features for enhanced safety and usability. It is available in three colours, namely Metallic Blue, Pearl white, and Glossy Yellow.



TAWANG CALLING

Jawa Motorcycles has unveiled a new special edition of the 42, christened the 'Tawang Edition' at the Torgya Festival, celebrated by the Monpa community of Arunachal Pradesh to welcome a prosperous new year. The production of the Jawa 42 Tawang Edition will be limited to just 100 units, and it is made exclusively for customers from Arunachal Pradesh, and neighbouring regions. The new Jawa 42 Tawang Edition is based on the Sports Stripe Allstar Black variant. On the mechanical end, the Jawa 42 Tawang Edition remains identical to the standard variant. The model takes inspiration from 'Lungta', a mythical wind horse from this region that symbolises prosperity. The motorcycle also features a Lungta motif on the fuel tank and front fender, along with other inscriptions inspired by the north-eastern region across body panels. Every motorcycle also gets a unique numbered bronze medallion to mark the special edition units.

WARDROBE UPDATE

Jawa Yezdi Motorcycles has introduced new colours across two of its highest-selling models – The Jawa 42 Sports Stripe and Yezdi Roadster. The Jawa 42 Sports Stripe gets a dynamic shade of metallic Cosmic Carbon while a Crimson Dual Tone in gloss finish has been added to the Yezdi Roadster range. Both motorcycles retain the same standard powertrains with no changes and come with a 6-speed transmission, with the Yezdi Roadster getting a slip-assist clutch. On the braking front, they get dual-channel ABS by Continental. The Jawa 42 Cosmic Carbon is priced at ₹ 1.95 lakh, while the Yezdi Roadster Crimson Dual Tone will cost ₹ 2.03 lakh, both prices ex-showroom, Delhi.

EV PEDAL POWER

Pune-based EV startup EMotorad has launched two new ranges of e-bikes for the Indian market. The company has unveiled the Elite range, which includes the ultra-premium Desert Eagle and Nighthawk. The company has also launched the X-Factor range, which includes the X1, X2 and X3. The Desert Eagle as well as the top-end Nighthawk come with a Bafang 250W mid-drive motor that delivers 12.23 kgm of peak torque. The e-bikes feature a durable aluminium frame that comes with a frame-integrated 17.5 Ah battery. They also feature SRAM shifters, a Proven Motion Control damper and hydraulic disc brakes on the front and rear. The EMotorad X1, X2 and X3 feature steel frames and offer a range of up to 40 km based on the terrain and the payload. All three e-bikes are equipped with 250W rear hub motors. While the X1 and X2 are equipped with a removable 7.8 Ah battery, the X3 features a frame-integrated 7 Ah battery. While the X1 offers a single level of pedal assist and 12 magnets, the X2 and X3 offer three levels of pedal assist and 12 magnets. EMotorad has priced the Desert Eagle at ₹ 4.75 lakh, while the Nighthawk has been priced at Rs 5 lakh. The X1, X2 and X3, which have been tagged as 'economy e-bikes' are priced at ₹ 24,999, ₹ 27,999 and ₹ 32,999 respectively.

SHORT BURST

Hero MotoSports Team finished its Dakar 2023 campaign with its best-ever performance, with a top-ten overall finish, two stage wins, and a stage podium. Sebastian Buhler, the team's youngest rider, finished the 138-km final special stage (Stage 14) between Al Hofuf and Dammam in sixth place. His teammates Franco Caimi and Ross Branch finished four minutes behind him, finishing 13th and 14th in the RallyGP class.

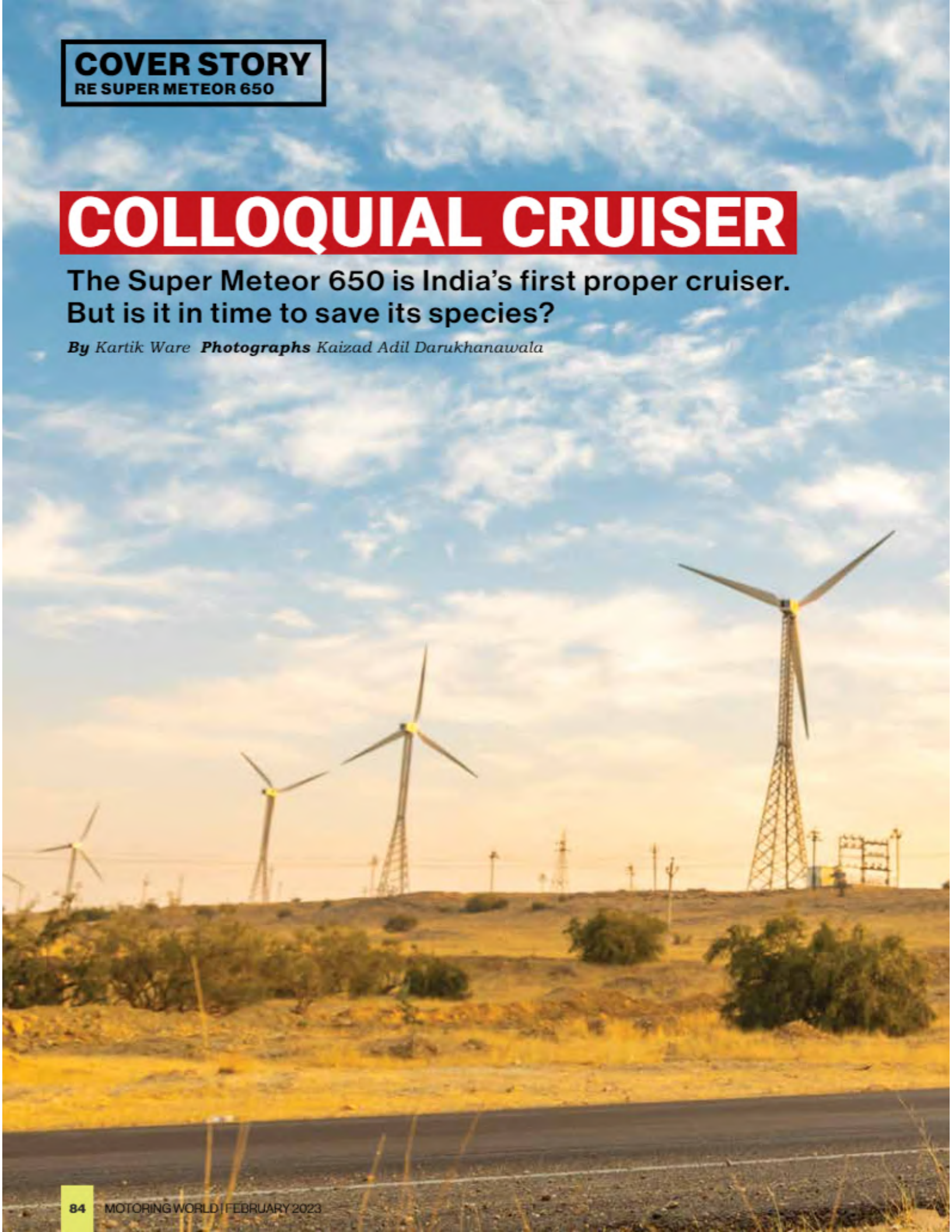
KTM kicks off the RC Cup city qualifiers amid high registrations, with more than 1000 racers across India expected to participate. The top three winners of the RC Cup will win a visit to the global HQ of KTM in Austria. The prize also includes training with the Race Director in Austria, interacting with KTM Factory Racing athletes, and the opportunity to watch a MotoGP race live at the Red Bull ring, along with a visit to the prestigious KTM Motohall.

After Bengaluru and Jaipur, Hero MotoCorp has inaugurated a new experience centre in the national capital, and will offer its first electric scooters, the V1 Plus and V1 Pro, through this outlet. Apart from announcing the inauguration of the new dealership, the company has also commenced the deliveries of its electric scooters in Delhi, not too long after opening the bookings for the Vida V1 range in November 2022.

COLLOQUIAL CRUISER

The Super Meteor 650 is India's first proper cruiser. But is it in time to save its species?

By *Kartik Ware* ***Photographs*** *Kaizad Adil Darukhanawala*



Once upon a time in India, cruisers were all the chrome-and-rumble rage. They were the ultimate big bikes, and we even had a 125cc cruiser to laugh at before getting to the first imports from Eastern Asia and finally Harley-Davidson's official arrival in India. All along that road, our imaginations were fired up by custom-bike TV shows and images of forward-set feet heading towards worldwide horizons. And as it went with Indian motorcycling, then and now, Royal Enfield had more than a big part in painting those pictures as riders on all kinds of homegrown machines became part of the cruiser mosaic. And despite the Thunderbirds' and Meteor's successes, I've always felt that the genre hit a flat spot a long time ago in terms of real-world cruising character and ability, becoming a faint echo gone long down the road. The Super Meteor 650 is now here to bring that rumble back.

Cruisers aren't really my kind of bikes. That's just a wee bit strange because a handful of them vibe high on my list of all-time-favourite motorcycles. And yes, they're all American V-twins. So when I first saw it, I thought it was a good thing that the Super Meteor looked like it was designed in a room full of Harley-Davidson posters. Where many contemporary cruisers look like sci-fi machines, the Super Meteor wore a classic look that fits right in with the mood of a cruiser and with RE's overall palette. I thought of it as a little Fat Boy with the familiar Bullet frame loop on its flanks, with fenders whose area must be measured in square metres. There wasn't as much chrome as I'd expect on this kind of motorcycle, so I didn't get blinded in the sun while looking at it. And RE has raised quality to the next level; put the Super Meteor next to the older 650s, and they'll start to look like RE's stepchildren.

But is this a cruiser? Doesn't a cruiser have to be a long-and-low V-twin? Well, think of it this way — if a V-twin can, so can a P-twin. Now, my opinion is confined to the Super Meteor's Celestial variant as it was the only one I rode, and

which comes with some optional bits and bobs as standard equipment like the windshield and the touring seat, among others. RE's first proper cruiser also has the company's first LED headlight and first USD fork made by Showa, all held together by an all-new chassis, of course. And while the motorcycle looked substantial both in person and on the spec sheet (241 kg), it was an embodiment of the traditional cruiser paradox that merges heft and ease, which gave it that calmness required to go down the long road. It was just so chilled out, even its horn made a sound that sounded like, 'Hey, I'm just rolling along here, move if you want to. Or not, I'll be right here chilling out.'

The 650cc parallel-twin felt like an easy language but with a different accent. Given a hard twist of the throttle, I was rewarded with a new intake roar, and the revised gearing seemed to stretch the lower gears longer than I remember on the other 650s. Either that, or the new airbox, exhaust and revised mapping made sprinting so much easier, it was almost a surprise when the soft rev limiter kicked in because the power showed no signs of tailing off. Fuelling was perfect and unperturbed at all times, too, and the 6-speed gearbox was as slick as ever. If I chose to, I could roll along at 50 kph in top gear without any snatching from the 'box, and that meant treating the Super Meteor like an automatic on open roads. It went from 50 kph to 120 kph in a manner that's quite sufficient for the cruising state of mind, and anyone could ride it all day like that. And on the one top-speed run I did, the needle pointed firmly at 160 kph, with perhaps a bit more left to go. This one's a heavyweight, sure, but it's no slouch.

However, the top of the windshield was at the perfect height to create a turbulent zone right at my helmet's visor. Anything above 110 kph and my vision would blur enough to seem like a new-age special effect. And at 160 kph, the world was

Huge rear disc + twin-piston calliper = old-school riding

Chassis loop is a throwback to old RE frames

Additional bolstering to the head for that 'one-piece' feeling

> **The 650cc parallel-twin felt like an easy language but with a different accent**

ROYAL ENFIELD
TN07D
B5493
IND

Quality has stepped up a notch, as proved by the fittings and finishes. We now expect this to be the norm with RE

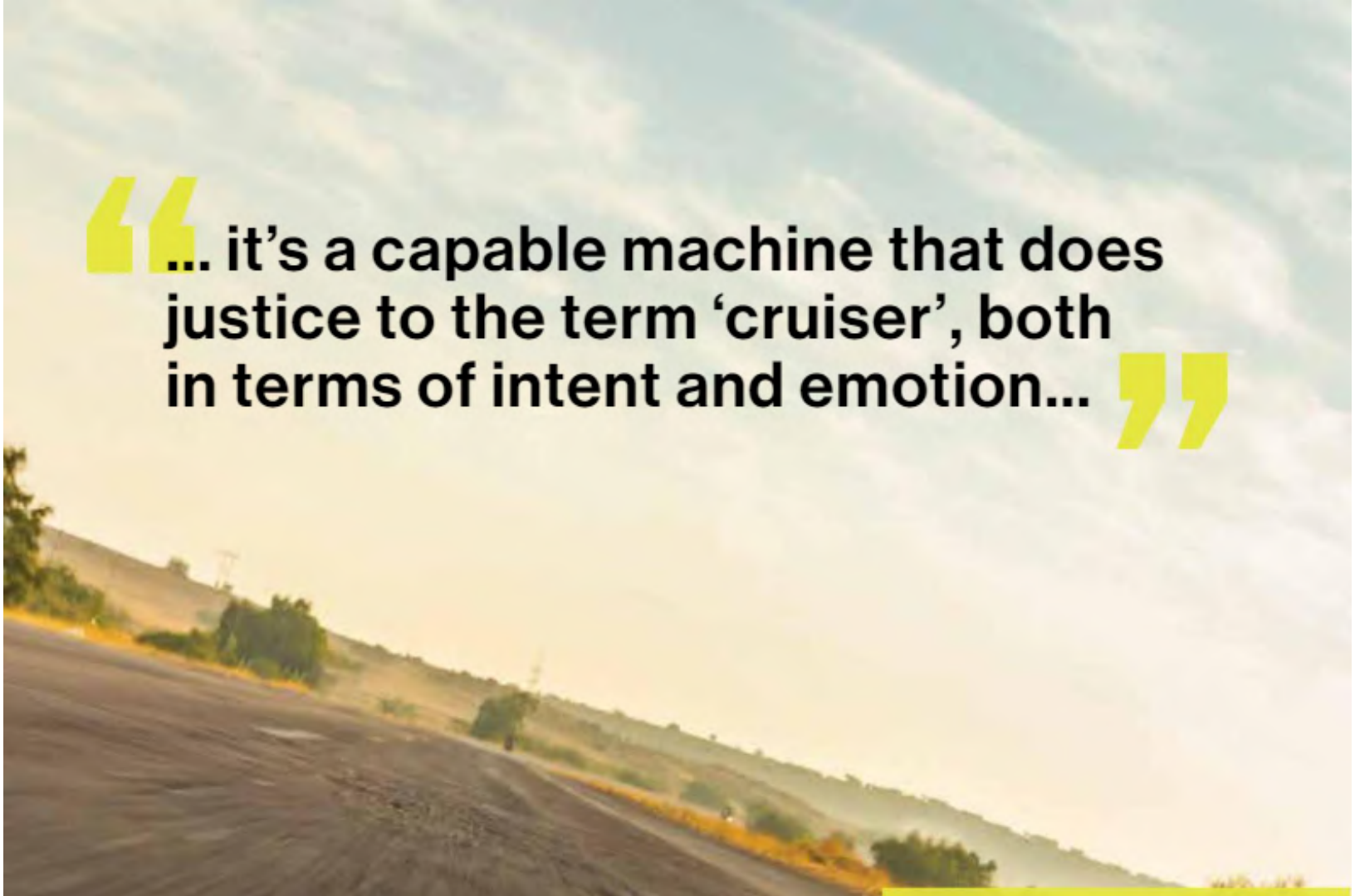
"Would I ride it to Ladakh, though? Yes, but only once the entire road is paved..."

all but a watercolour painting — that's not the kind of trip I'd expect from a cruiser. So I found myself covering ground at 100-100 kph for the most part; the mirrors stayed vibe-free, there was no tachometer to measure revs at cruising speeds, and the relaxed feet-forward riding position made me wonder when my lower back would start its inevitable protests. However, before that happened, I hit a set of corners and the Super Meteor turned into a willing dancing partner.

Okay, so this motorcycle wasn't what I'd call 'telepathic' in its handling, but it never demanded more than a gentle input, either. This is a cruiser, after all, and the deliberate use of a big rear disc and twin-piston rear calliper is present for a reason. The Super Meteor responds very well to the traditional way of riding a cruiser, with loads of rear-brake action necessary to slow things down with composure. At speed, ham-footed use of the brake did cause ABS to cut in like an overzealous chaperone, but the smoother I was, the better the whole ship sailed. The Super Meteor's turning circle, thanks no doubt to the USD fork, is not exactly generous, and tight U-turns required more planning than I expected.

But throwing it around corners, fast and slow, presented no problems; the all-new frame, suspension and the additional bolstering on the engine head created a tight and 'one-piece' motorcycle that felt sportier than I expected it to. Triple-digit sweepers were dispatched with the same poise as tighter turns, and the tyres were well up to the task of grinding the footpegs in either case. As you can imagine, that caused confidence to swell, and after a while I started thinking that RE's motorsport team might just consider starting a Bagger series like them Yanks do in the AMA, fairing and all. And even if they don't, the Super Meteor is fun enough on the road to give you more than a taste of what it might be like.

Would I ride it to Ladakh, though? Yes, but only once the entire road is paved, that's for sure. The Super Meteor isn't an uncomfortable motorcycle, not by a long shot, but I did feel every bad patch in detail. This wasn't a problem on smooth roads, but it also wasn't the plush carefree ride I expected on a cruiser. Nonetheless, I managed to clock a couple of hours in the saddle without going numb, so testing the tank's approximate



> "... it's a capable machine that does justice to the term 'cruiser', both in terms of intent and emotion..."

range of 350-400 km shouldn't be a problem. What could be better? Well, the meter console design was a letdown, especially when I looked at the switchgear, hand levers, badges and paint finish. It should've looked more classic, and should've had a distance-to-empty readout on what is clearly a real-world cruiser. And I wish RE would give that Tripper pod a permanent rest; I don't know of anyone who uses the thing and a nicely made phone mount as standard fitment would be ideal.

For all the riders of the various Thunderbirds through the ages to those who ride the Meteor 350 today, this is the world-class upgrade they all need. Elsewhere, I imagine it's for those who want to make their garages a bit more rational instead of endlessly negotiating with a motorcycle that demands more of them than they can give. I do think that the time of the cruiser has passed, but all it takes to rekindle the flame is one good motorcycle — and the Super Meteor is certainly just that. It fills an open niche, whether it's time for a cruiser or not. And I have a feeling it's about to bring people back to old-school cruising in a way we haven't seen in the recent past, certainly never by an Indian manufacturer.

Beyond the necessary dissections of testing a new motorcycle, the Super Meteor felt like an old idea whose time had come around again. It was cool and chilled out, and there's nothing like it in terms of attitude at the price. More importantly, it's a capable machine that does justice to the term 'cruiser', both in terms of intent and emotion, and that's a difficult one to pull off. Which also explains the long rides I've already begun plotting down highways, familiar and otherwise. It's a colloquial cruiser for a global audience, sure. But its essence is that of a dwelling from which to meditate upon the horizon, swept along in a long-distance trance. Time to get those saddlebags ready, then. ■

MOTODATA

ROYAL ENFIELD SUPER METEOR 650

POWERTRAIN	
Displacement	648cc, parallel twin
Max power	46.35 bhp@7250 rpm
Max torque	5.33 kgm@5650 rpm
Transmission	6-speed
CHASSIS	
Type	Steel tubular spine frame
BRAKES	
F/R	320-mm disc / 300-mm disc
TYRES	
F/R	100/90 R19 / 150/80 R16
DIMENSIONS	
L/W/H (mm)	2260/890/1155
Wheelbase	1500 mm
Ground clearance	135 mm
Seat height	740 mm
Kerb weight	241 kg
Fuel capacity	15.7 litres
PRICE	₹ **3.48** LAKH to ₹ **3.78** LAKH (ex-showroom)

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SOULFUL RIDING

The W175 is Kawasaki's most affordable motorcycle to date, but is it cut out to be a mass-seller? We find out

By *Janak Sorap* ***Photographs*** *Kaizad Adil Darukhanawala*

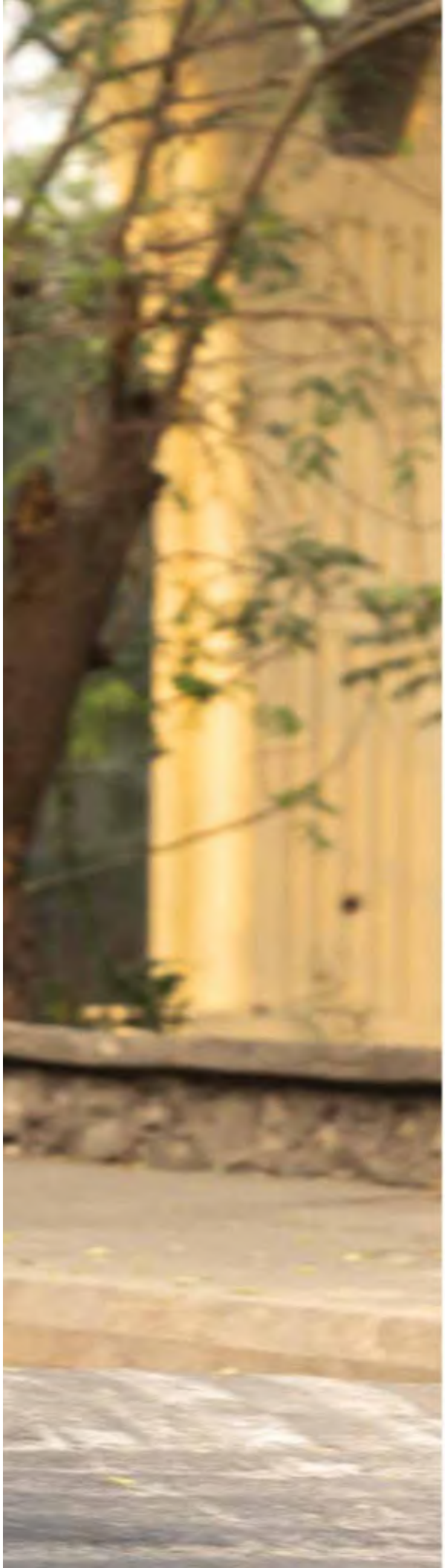
Kawasaki has been catering to retro buyers for some time now with its array of beautiful retro-modern motorcycles like the Z900RS, Z650RS, and W800. My line of work has provided me with opportunities to ride most of them, and every occasion I've spent time with these bikes has left me wanting to ride them even more. Despite being known for offering us some of the fastest, and most technologically advanced, motorcycles that money can buy, Team Green manages to pull off a fantastic range of retro motorcycles that capture the essence of an old-school motorcycle, while providing the reliability and finesse of a modern machine.

One such example is the W800, a British motorcycle, built and perfected with Japanese accuracy, which is a unique thing for a motorcycle by itself. But, it isn't everyone's cup of tea (including myself) as affording a motorcycle like the W800, and maintaining it as it should be, isn't within everyone's reach. And while this limits the brand to premium buyers only, it prevents the masses from getting that retro experience, and also holds back business opportunities for the company. Kawasaki is aware of this and to bridge this void, it has developed a mass-market offering by presenting us with the W175.

Although the W175 has been sold in other Asian markets for a while now, the folks at Kawasaki India have told us that the W175 has been developed in-house in collaboration with Japanese engineers. The one here is the India-specific version of the motorcycle that has undergone a few alterations in terms of mechanicals and features. Having that said, the W175 can be summed up in three words— retro, minimalistic, and mechanical.

Retro because it has the classic lines of what describes a motorcycle at first glance. It has a large circular headlamp with a chrome bezel, a teardrop-shaped fuel tank, boxy body panels, wire wheels, and a rather simple tail-lamp design. The test bike provided was finished in Ebony black, which I feel is very boring and plain compared to the Candy Persimmon Red colour option that also gets gold pinstripes and a chunky emblem on either side of the tank, instead of a sticker. However, surprisingly, it is the former that is receiving more inquiries and bookings. Each to their own, I guess.

Higher up, the W175 accentuates its retro styling with the pea-shooter



Simple instrumentation packs all the necessary stuff

Large and firm saddle is perfect to long jaunts

Pea-shooter exhaust looks, and sounds, good

Strong mid-range is the main USP of this mill

exhaust, comfortable flat and wide seat, and exposed mechanicals. One can see the oil lines for dispatching oil from the crankcase to the cylinder head for lubrication, the exposed throttle body with the cable to control the throttle, and other components that form the W175's powertrain. And what a gem of a motor it is. If you weren't quite convinced with this Kawasaki's looks, you surely will be with its engine. Being a 177cc single-cylinder mill, the power and torque it produces are just about right for riding in city traffic. The torque is mainly concentrated at the low- and mid-section of the rev band, which makes it a hoot to ride as you make your way through the busy streets of Mumbai.

Its slim profile and compact dimensions allow it to squeeze through tight spaces and get ahead of traffic. The W175's slick 5-speed gearbox is best enjoyed while being ridden between the 30-80 kph. It is one of those bikes that lets you enjoy refinement and simplicity more than chasing a top speed. But if you had to, the W175 manages to clock 108 kph, which is great for a motorcycle of its class, especially when you consider how the vibrations are minimised even at high revs.

To accompany this kind of engine performance, the W175 offers an equally pliant suspension setup. The motorcycle features a telescopic fork at the front and a dual shock-absorber arrangement at the rear, which is set on the firmer side, but still manages to soak up small bumps and potholes well. While this kind of setup provides more confidence while cornering, it also keeps things engaging and fun every time you swing a leg over it.

However, to enjoy the bike's agility, performance, and cornering speed to the fullest, brakes are a critical element that needs to be on point. And I am happy to report that, despite having a disc-drum setup, the braking performance is on point and trustworthy. While you have the safety net of a single-channel ABS, the bite from the disc and progressive brake-in from the drum are effective at shedding speeds quickly.

Lastly, along with everything else the W175 has to offer, what it also ranks high in, is providing a very ergonomic riding stance. I usually prefer to mention a bike's riding triangle earlier in a story, but the W175's other aspects impressed me a lot. As mentioned earlier, the seat is long and wide, which allows for a lot of room for a rider, and a pillion, to sit comfortably. The seat cushion

“Once seated, the hands and feet land naturally on their designated positions...”

is on the firmer side, which takes a while to get used to, but is perfect for the spine and for spending long hours on.

Once seated, the hands and feet land naturally on their designated positions, automatically making the ride experience a comfortable one. The motorcycle has a seat height of 790 mm, which will be appreciated by short riders, and a kerb weight of 135 kg, which will be welcomed by smaller-framed riders, the fairer sex, and aged riders who are seeking a light-weight motorcycle.

To conclude, the Kawasaki W175 is a motorcycle that evokes a similar kind of emotion like the W800, but in a smaller package. It is a motorcycle that offers the joy of motorcycling in a minimalistic manner, with strong build quality, and a lightweight build. Yes, one could say that the motorcycle is bare-basic on the equipment front, but that in itself is the essence of the simplified, retro-motorcycling experience that Kawasaki wants to offer.

Coming to the last (and quite important) bit — the sticker price that Kawasaki has put on the W175, which is ₹ 1.47 lakh for the Ebony, and ₹ 1.49 lakh for the Candy Persimmon Red (both prices are ex-showroom). In the present market, where competitors are offering more displacement and features for the same price, Kawasaki might have got a little too ambitious with the price tag, or got a little late at introducing such a motorcycle. Whatever it seems to be, the fact remains that the W175 is one interesting motorcycle when seen from a singular perspective. If that doesn't happen, which I sadly feel would be the case, Kawasaki will have to rework the W175's pricing if their aim is to chase the kind of numbers a mass-market motorcycle is expected to return. Only time will reveal the W175's fate. ■

MOTODATA

KAWASAKI W175

POWERTRAIN	
Displacement	177cc, single
Max power	12.87 bhp@7500 rpm
Max torque	1.3 kgm@6000 rpm
Transmission	5-speed
CHASSIS	
Type	Double cradle frame
BRAKES	
F/R	270-mm disc / drum
TYRES	
F/R	80/100 R17 / 100/90 R17
DIMENSIONS	
L/W/H (mm)	2005/805/1050
Wheelbase	1320 mm
Ground clearance	165 mm
Seat height	790 mm
Kerb weight	135 kg
Fuel capacity	12 litres
PRICE	₹ **1.47** LAKH (ex-showroom)

ISSUE SPECIAL
INDIAN ROADMASTER DARK HORSE

WHITE STEAD

White is the new black, or so Indian would have you believe

By *Janak Sorap* ***Photographs*** *Kaizad Adil Darukhanawala*

If you have the half a crore you needed just lying around to buy this motorcycle, it is highly unlikely that you are reading this story. I say this because people with that kind of spending power have chucked away the aspect of rationality from their minds a long time ago. And if you thought that was an insult, well it isn't, not even close. Instead, it seems to be the only rational way to introduce the motorcycle that's shown on these pages. To a mind not steeped in affluence, it would make more sense to buy five motorcycles, each with its own purpose, right? If you agree with that, the Indian Roadmaster Dark Horse surely isn't the motorcycle meant for you. Everything about this motorcycle is so grand, that any kind of logical reasoning has no place here.

And it shouldn't be, because every inch of this motorcycle is covered in oodles of grandeur, luxury, comfort, power, and so much more. The very presence of the motorcycle in itself can leave everyone in close vicinity awestruck, thanks to its sheer size. Unlike most motorcycles of its class that are heavily dipped in chrome with candy-glazed painted surfaces and exposed mechanicals, the Roadmaster Dark Horse does it differently, or rather, goes in the opposite direction. All components that would usually be chromed are finished in matte black, while the motorcycle's painted surfaces are finished in matte pearl white livery, which, in my opinion, looks more badass and draws even more attention.

I got onto the bike very, very early in the morning and even in the darkness, the Dark Horse looks so beautifully intimidating, it almost inspires hate. Given its proportions, it has a huge expanse of flowing bodywork, the batwing front fairing, lower fairing, and the saddle boxes and the top box. The front fairing has an integrated massive windshield that is electrically adjustable to deflect the wind blast away from the rider. Yes, it's very helpful and necessary when riding this motorcycle because of the kind of speed that it is capable of.

Yes, you read that right. This is a fast motorcycle. However, it isn't the speed that amazes you, but how it rides from the moment you get rolling. Despite its gigantic proportions, the Roadmaster Dark Horse is surprisingly nimble. It was only a matter of time until I got

“Think of it as the motorcycling equivalent of a diesel SUV”
Indian

Cockpit screen is feature-packed to the brim

Thunderstroke is big, smooth and punchy

Twin-discs pack the bite to haul this behemoth

accustomed to the large proportions and I was able to thread through gaps, and lean the bike into corners with confidence. The chassis is balanced so well that all the weight that's felt from the time of taking the bike off the kickstand simply vanishes as the wheels start rolling.

Contributing and uplifting that feeling even more is the V-twin from Indian, which can arguably be considered the master of V-twins today, especially in the areas of linear performance and refinement. Yes, Harley-Davidson's Milwaukee Eight motor probably has matched it on these parameters today (wait for a comparison story, will you?) but the way the Dark Horse does all of it while being singular, like one solid chunk, is something that only Indian has managed to pull off. It doesn't matter how you ride the Dark Horse, it simply adapts to it and rewards you all the way.

The gigantic fuel-injected 1890cc Thunderstroke air-cooled V-twin packs a colossal 17.43 kgm available at 3000 rpm. Think of it as the motorcycling equivalent of a diesel SUV, which it isn't, despite whatever its looks suggest. To provide some perspective, the Roadmaster Dark Horse weighs 403 kg, with the rider and pillion, along with a weekend's worth of luggage, and it still has the power to chase speeds of 160kph, which is ridiculous for the motorcycle that it is. I'm quite surprised that Indian chose to give it a 180/60 R16 rear tyre because this is the kind of torque that can shred rubber in no time.

What this specification translates to on the tarmac is even more impressive, though. Thumb the starter, and the motor sparks to life with an audible exhaust note that settles as the motor warms up to operating temperature. While the motorcycle emitted a muted, yet delightful, roar at cruising speeds, the feeling of freedom comes in stronger with every upshift of the 6-speed gearbox. To enjoy that feeling, a lot of it must be duly credited to the incredible level of comfort that the Roadmaster Dark Horse has to offer. Besides having

“... this level of comfort is something I don’t mind getting used to”

a roof above, the seats on this motorcycle are more comfortable than some of the premium cars in the market. The ergonomics are simply spot-on, and while I am not much of a fan of cruisers, this level of comfort is something I don't mind getting used to.

Besides the level of comfort that the Roadmaster fetches for its price tag, what Indian has also made it a point is to never compromise on quality levels. Right from the fit, finish to the features, tech, and audio system, everything is top-notch. Every single panel looks and feels as if it has been tailored to perfection and christened with the Indian logo at every suitable spot.

All things considered, the Indian Roadmaster Dark Horse, if not for the fantastic full-sized cruiser that it is, is all about making a statement of power and dominance, which it pulls off with absolute finesse. Yes, for its price tag one can fill up an entire garage with all sorts of motorcycles. On the flip side, the only other option would be to have an SUV, in which case you can say goodbye to exclusivity, or buy a matchbox apartment on the outskirts of the city. The Dark Horse is one of those dream machines that runs over all norms of rationality. And thank God for that. Oh, I forgot, if you were going to buy the Dark Horse, you wouldn't be reading this story. ■

MOTODATA

INDIAN ROADMASTER DARK HORSE

POWERTRAIN	
Displacement	1890cc, V-twin
Max power	NA
Max torque	17.43 kgm@3,000 rpm
Transmission	6-speed
CHASSIS	
Type	Steel tubular frame
BRAKES	
F/R	300-mm twin discs/ 300-mm single disc
TYRES	
F/R	130/60 R19 / 180/60 R16
DIMENSIONS	
L/W/H (mm)	2593/1022/1415
Wheelbase	1668 mm
Ground clearance	140 mm
Seat height	673 mm
Kerb weight	403 kg
Fuel capacity	20.8 litres
PRICE	₹ **43.15**LAKH (ex-showroom, India)

SHORT SHIFT
SUZUKI BURGMAN STREET 125 EX

A LITTLE EX-TRA

We look at all the updates Suzuki has given to its maxi-style scooter

By *Keshav Teiva Poumai*
Photographs *Kaizad Adil Darukhanawala*

Maxi-scooters sold in our country have always been a little odd to me. It is a case of Goldilocks trying to find the one that is just perfect, but also having to sift through all the ones that aren't in the process. The Suzuki Burgman was one that was the closest to the end result, and quite a number of people have come to that same conclusion since it arrived in the market.

Now, the latest update with the Burgman Street EX seems to have taken care of the only disproportionate part of the scooter, which was the rather small 10-inch wheel at the back. Everything else remains untouched, as one wouldn't want to mess with a winning formula too much, lest it falls apart. It gets the same digital instrument cluster unit as the Ride Connect variant, and the same 124cc single-cylinder engine as on the lower Burgman variants, Access 125, and even the Avenis.

The Burgman Street EX additionally gets the new Suzuki Eco Performance Alpha feature, along with Suzuki's silent starter and smart start-stop functions. All this combined makes for quite the economic ride within the city. The smart start-stop function works beautifully in stop-and-go traffic, where the engine goes into hibernation silently within five seconds of coming to a halt, and silently comes back to life upon twisting the throttle.

The riding ergonomics remain untouched with the wide handlebar, and Suzuki's 'flexible foot position', which allows one to stretch their legs out and comfortably place them on the footrest moulded into the apron. The seat cushioning does seem to be a bit on the softer side, which may play spoilsport on longer commutes.

Looking at the ride quality on the new Burgman Street EX, one would expect it to be a lot better, owing to the new 12-inch rear wheel. Unfortunately, Suzuki seems to have messed around with both the front and rear suspension in the process, thus making the ride quality stiffer than one would like. This means that the rear end doesn't cushion the rider against most bumps as nicely as it used to on the older models.

That being said, the Burgman Street EX does feel a tad sharper when it comes to handling. The

> "It seems that Suzuki has taken the concept of 'no pain, no gain' a bit too seriously with this update"

The instrument cluster remains the same

The smart start-stop function works great

It almost feels like a sticker upgrade

larger rear wheel and the firm rear end make sure that it goes into corners with a lot more confidence now. Braking on the maxi-scooter also seems to have improved in comparison to the older variants. It seems that Suzuki has taken the concept of 'no pain, no gain' a bit too seriously with this update.

It still gets the 21.5-litre under-seat storage, bottle holder, and storage compartment, with a lid housing a 12-V socket located below the handlebar. As previously stated, this is not a facelift, but rather an update to the existing model. It is still the bold, butch and bulky maxi-scooter that we all really liked from the get-go, with a few more-than-bearable changes (a few being genuine upgrades), so it is very likely to do well for Suzuki once again. ■

MOTODATA

SUZUKI BURGMAN STREET 125 EX

POWERTRAIN	
Displacement	124cc, single
Max power	8.4 bhp@6500 rpm
Max torque	1.01 kgm@5500 rpm
Transmission	CVT
CHASSIS	
Type	Underbone
SUSPENSION	
F/R	Telescopic/Hydraulic monoshock
BRAKES	
F/R	Disc/Drum
TYRES	
F/R	90/90-R12/100/80-R12
DIMENSIONS	
L/W/H (mm)	1875/700/1140
Wheelbase	1290 mm
Ground clearance	160 mm
Seat height	780 mm
Kerb weight	111 kg
Fuel capacity	5.5 litres
PRICE	₹ **1,12,300** (ex-showroom, Delhi)

ISSUE SPECIAL
ULTRAVIOLETTE F77

FUTURE READY

The new Ultraviolette F77 is here to showcase what lies ahead for the future of motorcycling. And we like it

By *Janak Sorap* ***Photographs*** *Govind Gadekar*

Perhaps the most memorable moments in life are the unplanned, illogical ones. It's when you see through a decision that's way down on your priority list (even if you have one, that is), that's when, more often than not, life seems to surprise you. These aren't words of wisdom, as I scarcely have a few to spare. They are simply the musings of a writer, month after month. That said, I don't believe that makes them wrong, though.

You see, you don't dream vividly of a machine that, on the face of it, fits in nowhere. It definitely doesn't make you stand by it and wonder as to why it hasn't been around for longer. And yet, every single line and contour of the Ultraviolette F77 screams 'Take me home.' And I surely would, if I could. In my books, the design elements of the motorcycle itself have been so thoroughly accomplished, along with the functional aspect that the F77 is one of the most remarkable-looking motorcycles to enter the market.

What does it for me is how the front's been designed, and how the defined lines emerge constituting the flow of the motorcycle before converging to a nicely packed tail. There's sharpness and cohesiveness, along with a healthy dose of aggression that I haven't come across with an electric motorcycle till date. The body surface appears to be like the muscles that the motorcycle has acquired from going to the gym, in this case, the designers have done a fantastic job of depicting the essence of speed and power even when the motorcycle is at standstill.

Both, the headlamp and taillamp, despite their function, share a common link in the design of the cluster, which also connects everything in between. I know looks are a subjective matter, but there's no harm in saying that the F77 is a very striking motorcycle, especially when it is coming from a young and zealous start-up based in Bengaluru.

And what makes the deal even sweeter, is when you swing a leg over the F77's saddle, everything falls in place, comfortably. Off the bike, the notion is that it's going to be a cumbersome bike to ride, but instead, it felt the exact opposite. I was very much sitting inside the motorcycle rather than

All digital display looks great and is feature-packed

Well-sculpted two-piece saddle with lots of room

Normal charger takes five hours for a full charge

> "The motorcycle leans and performs typically like how a good fun motorcycle would"

on it. The palms land properly on the handlebar, while the feet settle naturally on the pegs. And there is ample room on that saddle to move around, too.

The instrumentation is all-digital and, thankfully, isn't touch-sensitive unlike the usual trend. Instead, you have switchgear on the left handlebar with symbols that resemble a Playstation controller to browse through the menu and change the settings. There is no clutch lever here since it's electric, but the front brake lever is adjustable. One eyesore, though, are the mirrors that need more refinement in terms of how they look and function.

Moving to the F77's operation and to how it rides, let's take things one step at a time. Most of it is great, which is something that I can assure you of right away. The Ultraviolette F77 comes with three riding modes — Glide, Combat, and Ballistic — and as each name suggests, they perform quite literally as mentioned. I spent the maximum time riding the F77 in Combat mode, and whenever the opportunity allowed, switched to Ballistic mode to savour the spontaneous accelerations. Ultraviolette claims a 0-60 kph acceleration in 3.1 seconds, and 0-100 kph in 8 seconds flat in Ballistic mode, which are nothing but healthy numbers to go by. But, what makes this electric motorcycle achieve all of that is its carefully engineered powertrain.

The F77 packs a powerful permanent magnet AC motor that gets its power from a 10.3-kWh battery pack, which, at present, is the largest to ever feature on an Indian electric two-wheeler. Spec-wise, the F77's powertrain is engineered to deliver a maximum power output of 38.88 bhp and 9.68 kgm of peak torque, which is quite impressive. But what's even more surprising, though, is how the F77 rides. All the power is sent to the rear wheel via a chain drive. The motorcycle leans and performs typically like how a good fun motorcycle would.

The first leg of the ride was held at Nandi Hills, where I was able to put the F77 through its paces at the variety of corners that the <i>ghats<i> are well-known for. From sweeping corners to sharp corners to the hairpins at the top, the delivery of power was linear with nothing to complain about at all. In fact, the dynamics of the F77 are so good that I was able to aggressively lean out in the corners while carrying a healthy rate of speed. The suspension is setup on the stiffer side, but for the class of motorcycle it belongs to and the kind of performance it packs, it feels justified. On the straight patches of tarmac, in Ballistic mode, I managed to clock a top speed of 140 kph, considering the road conditions. The F77 is quick to accelerate to about 125 kph, beyond which, it builds speed gradually.

After riding the F77 on the roads, the second leg of the ride was held at the MECO Kartopia go-kart circuit, where I again got to exploit the fantastic handling capabilities of the

Brakes are strong on the bite with good progression

All-LED headlamp is bright and looks fantastic

F77. Being a technical circuit, it involved a lot of precise acceleration and braking to get the fastest line around the circuit. While there was no engine braking available, I had to completely rely on the brakes to shed speed.

That said, I am happy to report that the anchors on the F77 do what is expected from them, while providing the confidence to brake harder with a strong bite. This complementary nature of the smooth acceleration and retardation meant that I was free to explore the sides on which my knees were. My only disappointment at the circuit was not having my leathers as it was very difficult to resist the temptation of not being able to drag the knee sliders through the corners.

That said, the time that I got to spend on the Ultraviolette F77 has left me asking for more, as this machine has truly upset the status quo that stated electric motorcycles can't be fun. In this new evolving world of electrics, the F77, in my opinion, comes across as the strong contender, packing in the looks, features, powertrain, and dynamics to qualify as a well-rounded machine and, most importantly, also offers lots of fun, something that every well-engineered and designed bike should. If this is the future of motorcycles, I am keen to be a part of this journey. ■

ISSUE SPECIAL
DIRTLOGUE100
ENDURO TRACK

EDGE PREPARATION

From riding over a bed of tyres to performing a balancing act over a see-saw, our man gets a taste of enduro riding

By *Janak Sorap* ***Photographs*** *Kaizad Adil Darukhanawala*

Look at the adjacent image, it might not be visible from here, but there's a three-foot drop to the ground beyond that platform's edge. It is quite nerve-wracking to see the front wheel of the XPulse less than three centimetres from the edge. As for the next sequence of images, anyone, including myself, could only imagine going off the edge and having a nasty fall. However, if you pay attention to my body position, it indicates a different outcome, which is exactly what happened. Shifting my weight to the outside, the motorcycle naturally tilts inwards, and is further nudged in with the application of foot pressure on the right peg. To be able to perform this kind of manoeuvre to correct the line at that moment, without panicking, comes only with a good amount of practice and experience. And these skills, and the level of alertness, are extremely crucial if you have a thing for off-roading, enduro, or dirt riding. Because, as much fun as it may look to ride a motorcycle off the tarmac, and at speed at that, things can get pretty nasty in no time.

But, why am I telling you all this? Here at Dirtlogue100, which is an enduro track located on the outskirts of Pune city, is a new playground for off-road enthusiasts to learn and sharpen their motorcycling skills. The track is a creation of Autologue Design in association with the 100kmph apparel brand and Castrol Power1. The course has been designed by off-road rider Suraj Giri, who also doubles as one of the coaches at the enduro track. The challenging obstacle course is split into two tracks, running parallel to each other. While one is the expert track that involves a higher difficulty level for experienced riders, the other is

> **The technique requires coordination of the clutch and throttle, while dynamically shifting weight to get across**

a toned-down one designed keeping beginner off-road riders in mind.

Now, I am far from a pro rider when it comes to off-roading, so my choice of machine had to be none other than the Hero XPulse 200. I have ridden the motorcycle on varying terrains and at multiple off-roading events, allowing me to better understand what is happening at the two contact patches, and, in turn, have oodles of fun riding it. The same applies to beginners, and even to senior riders up to an extent, as the XPulse 200 is light, agile, and packs just about enough power to overcome all sorts of tasks. That said, in case you haven't got one, the folks at Dirtlogue100 have got an Impulse and an XPulse, available on a rental basis.

Moving on to the course, there are in all 12 obstacles that have been specifically designed to replicate the conditions that one could face when riding off-road. The first obstacle involves riding over a tree log that is substantial in size. The technique requires coordination of the clutch and throttle, while dynamically shifting weight to get across. The next obstacle involves riding over

That's one way to clear the obstacle by keeping the front wheel in the air

“The obstacles require the rider to be in-sync with the motorcycle’s controls...”

Stand tall and look where you want to go, and you shall get there

First gear, rear brake and weight shifted to the back is how you do it

multiple wooden logs, requiring a steady throttle and sharp balancing skills to pass through. The difficulty goes up by a level with the next obstacle, which involves concrete pipes positioned in a criss-cross pattern, demanding more precise throttle control and balance. And if that wasn't enough, the next one was riding over a bed of car tyres, and that is after jumping over a concrete pipe! Get a grip on that.

Here onwards, the course gets even more technical, involving banked elevations, narrow platforms (tyre bridge for the expert track), a bed of large boulders, and a sequence of various inclines and declines made of different terrains. The above-mentioned obstacles require the rider to be in-sync with the motorcycle's controls while maintaining a farsight of the path ahead. Last, but not the least, was the see-saw, wherein one needs to literally ride up on a giant see-saw, and time the speed of approach perfectly so that it tips over to the other side after crossing the balancing point. This, and the jump landing on the narrow platform, were by far the scariest of the lot for me. But, the important thing there is to listen to the coaches and consciously apply the technique. The second important thing here is to try and maintain a constant pace. To achieve that, one should always remember that 'Slow is smooth and smooth is fast.' Master that, and you are halfway to acing this course.

But let's be honest, this course isn't an easy one, but a rather technical one — a gym for those to ride off-road, go trail riding, or those

Castro

> **A course like the one at Dirtlogue100, helps unlock a different dimension of riding a motorcycle**

Falling is a part of learning, it takes the fear away once you accept it

The intricate balancing act of a bike on a see-saw caught in action

This is what happens when you don't plan your approach well

who are into enduro. The cost per head is ₹ 2000 per session. Courses like these will help one prepare and anticipate almost every obstacle that anyone could come across on a day-to-day basis, when your day-to-day is riding off-road. It helps to tune one's ability to know and trust their motorcycle better, and, in the process, also know what motorcycles are capable of.

In hindsight, for a person like me who largely rides on the street, but is serious about motorcycling, a course like the one at Dirtlogue100, helps unlock a different dimension of riding a motorcycle. It has made me more relaxed and composed, while being alert and ready to perform the required action to avoid a sudden obstacle, rather than panicking.

If you felt the obstacles at Dirtlogue100 are extreme, fear not, as Mukal Nanda, the founder of Autologue Design, has plans of having an ADV-styled obstacle course that will be more approachable, and there'll also be a trail course. Also, did I mention that they have a flat-track course as well? Experiences like these are only going to make one a better and safer rider on the street, which I can strongly believe is necessary from what I have witnessed over time. Now go, get your bike and head to Dirtlogue100 now! And even if you aren't planning on hitting the trails anytime soon, our roads aren't any less at duplicating similar environments. ■

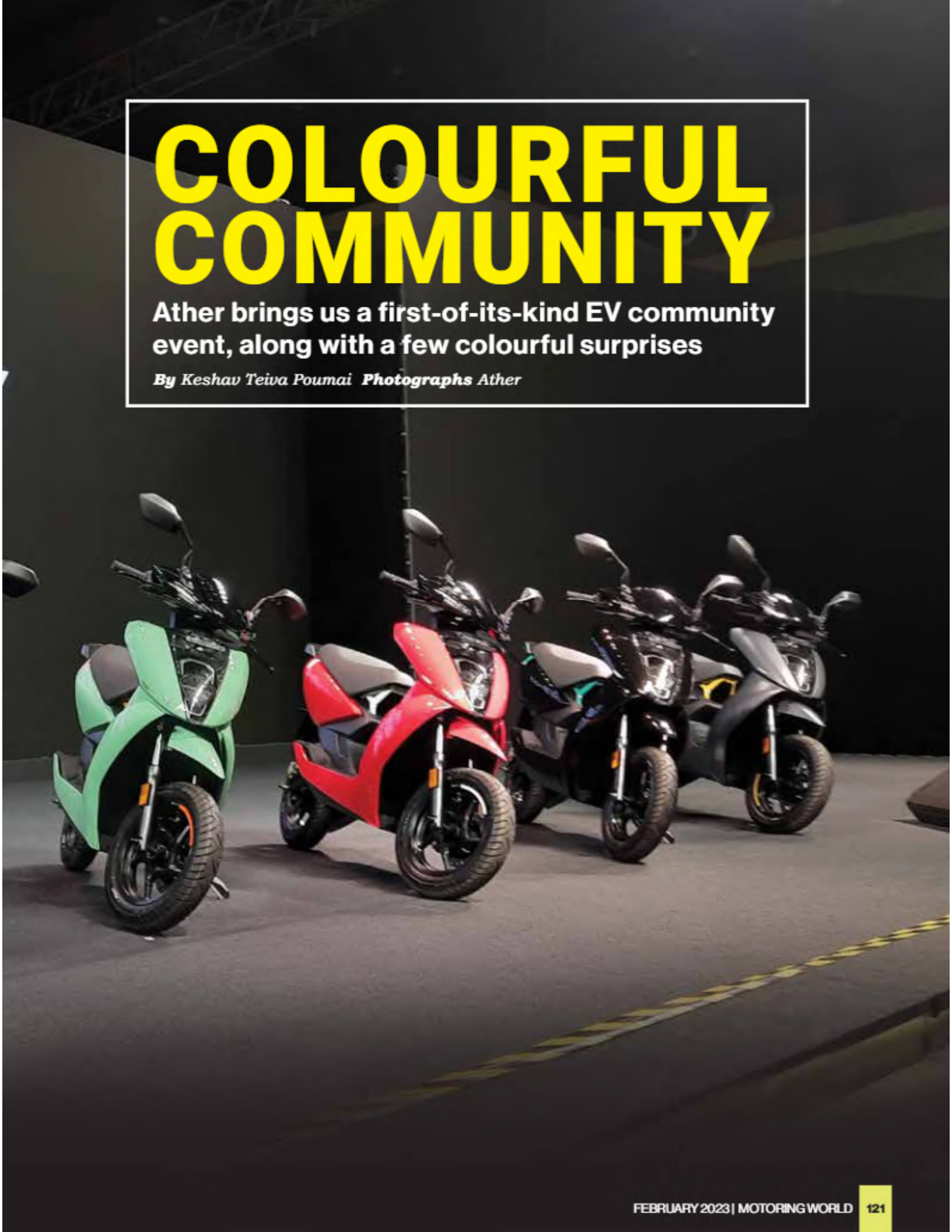
A big shoutout to Mukul Nanda and his entire team at Dirtlogue100 for letting us have lots of fun riding on the enduro track and get hands-on experience in training for riding enduro.

ATHER
COMMUNITY
DAY '23

COLOURFUL COMMUNITY

Ather brings us a first-of-its-kind EV community event, along with a few colourful surprises

By *Keshav Teiva Poumai* ***Photographs*** *Ather*



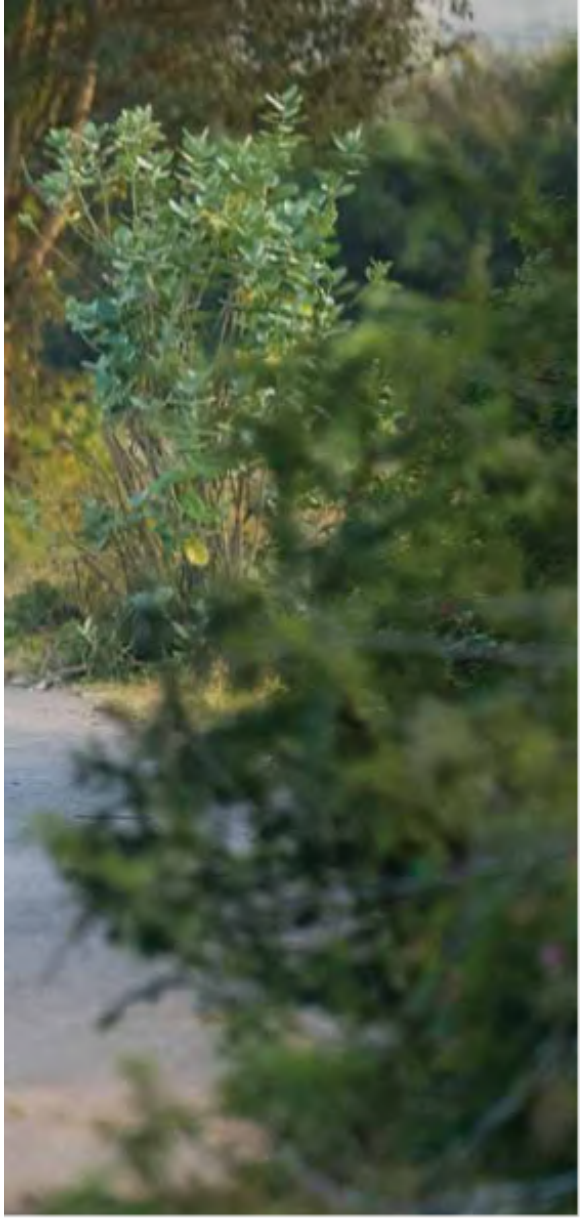
Ather Energy hosted its first customer event in Bengaluru, called the Ather Community Day. The event included a flurry of activities including new updates, community events and experiences, as well as Ather's rider awards called 'Ather Unlocked'. Knowing how biking festivals and community programmes have peaked in the past year, we were sure that this would be an interesting event.

As soon as one entered the venue, there was a timeline tunnel that laid out the journey of Ather Energy from its early days, all the way through its various milestones to today. Then there was the 'colour my scooter' booth, where people could add a bit of colour to the two scooters on display. There were a lot of colourful motifs and designs that had been added already, so we found a little empty patch on the scooter where we made our own unique mark.

We were then directed to the 'Town Square' where the Ather Unlocked event was taking place. From what we saw, there were different award categories, like the most distance covered on the odometer, the most distance covered in a day, the most charging stations visited, and so on. Looking at the winning numbers made one thing certain, and that is the EV commuter space has been growing successfully and at a steady rate. It looks like the reliability factor of the brand has really opened up people's minds.

On the occasion, Ather also rolled out AtherStack 5.0, its biggest software upgrade yet, bringing in a brand-new UI and unlocking new features. It now features Vector Maps, which gives the rider a very similar experience to what one would get while using Google Maps. The updated Maps also brings a live traffic view and a navigation view, showing the rider's perspective. The other major feature update comes in the form of AutoHold, which uses sensors and algorithms to stop and hold the scooter in place, even on very sharp inclines.

Ather also announced its new Battery Protect scheme, which extends the battery warranty to five years or 60,000 km from the prior three-year policy. Battery Protect covers battery failures and also guarantees a minimum of 70 per cent state-of-health for the battery at the end of five years. Battery Protect now comes as standard on the 450X (three + two years), while 450 Plus owners can buy the



> On the whole, the Ather Community Day event appeared to have been a huge success within the owners' community

additional two-year warranty for ₹ 6,999, although Tarun Mehta, the co-founder and CEO of Ather Energy stated that he is confident that it may not even be necessary, owing to the reliability of the battery component.

Ather also introduced four new colour options to its 450 lineup, which include True Red, Cosmic Black, Salt Green, and Lunar Grey. The 450 models now also get a wider, more ergonomic and more comfortable seat, which is compatible with all generations of the 450. Ather further introduced Neighborhood Charging, which provides access to charging points in shared private spaces such as apartment complexes and office buildings, and can be used to charge any EV at a rate of 3.3 kW.

Ather also unveiled a new front storage solution called the Frunk, which offers 'Quick Access' storage, without compromising the legroom of riders. It has a 14-litre capacity, with an additional waterproof compartment for mobile phones, and can hold up to 5 kg weight. It is made of 100 per cent polyester ripstop material, and is water and abrasion resistant. But, it's not just accessories that Ather had, as it dropped the first of its own line of apparel with illustrations inspired by the scooter, the people behind making it, and the people riding it.

On the whole, the Ather Community Day event appeared to have been a huge success within the owners' community, and even for the company itself, to be able to portray such numbers in the flesh. Being the first of its kind for the EV company, the event saw a high turnout and seemed to have been able to strengthen the community to a great extent. ■

PAINTING THE TOWN ORANGE

KTM gives their riders the opportunity to race their way to Austria with the KTM RC Cup

***By** Keshav Teiva Poumai* ***Photographs** KTM*

The idea of riding as fast as one is capable of on a track, with a machine on two wheels that literally moves because of controlled explosions within an engine that sits snugly between one's own two legs, always felt so exciting to me. Sure, to everyone else who doesn't ride a motorcycle, the whole concept must sound crazy, and I am not denying it at all. It is crazy, and it's the sort of crazy that is addictive, the kind that feels so good.

I got to experience this at the KTM RC Cup, Mumbai city qualifier round, which took place in Thane on January 14 and 15, 2023. The RC Cup is a part of KTM Pro-XP's endeavour to offer KTM owners experiences that make them pro riders. The selection round is set to go across seven more cities before hitting the MMRT, Chennai, for the Qualifiers and Finale conducted under the aegis of the FMSCI (Federation of Motor Sports Clubs of India).

With the opportunity to race on the company-provided KTM RC 390 GP Edition bikes, the top three winners of the RC Cup will win a visit to the global HQ of KTM in Austria. The prize also includes training with the Race Director in Austria, interacting with KTM Factory Racing athletes, and the opportunity to watch a MotoGP race live at the Red Bull ring, along with a visit to the prestigious KTM Motohall. Now, doesn't that sound like some crazy fun?

I had initially gone just to cover the kick-off event, but once I saw how fun it all looked, I couldn't resist the urge to give it a shot, and the kind folks at KTM obliged. I quickly completed the registration process and suited up. The race academy

Having Emmanuel Jebaraj in our corner was quite the confidence boost for us newbies

was directed and managed by Gusto Racing, one of India's premier race academies, with veteran racer Emmanuel Jebaraj at the helm.

The training sessions started soon, and all participants had to undergo a series of theory classes followed by some practice sessions on the track in quick succession. This was so that the instructors could give us live feedback on what mistakes we were making, along with providing pointers on how to improve. The three points that were heavily emphasised upon were our vision, body position, and racing lines. Once we had that down, we were all given a shot to record our fastest lap around the track.

Looking at the sheer number of participants, I was almost sure that I would not be able to make the cut. The fastest recorded lap was already set at 29.7 seconds, and with this being my first time on the track, I had no hope of doing that well, but I had to do my best. I went in gingerly as my in-lap started, getting a final read on my racing lines and trying to gauge my braking points. As soon as I saw the green flag, I gunned it, and owing to my over-enthusiasm and the short runway before the first corner, I overshot my braking point.

I realised, soon, that I had lost the window to make up for that mistake, so instead, I focused on just refining my technique and enjoying the out-lap. The RC 390 GP Edition bike is such a fun track tool, and is so easy to ride well. I managed to record a time of 35.5 seconds, not too shabby for my first time. Being there, I also witnessed a few others who did well enough to make it into the top 10. Now that I have been given a taste of this orange addiction, I sure look forward to the next time I get to take the RC 390 out on a track.. ■

BAD WINNERS
PEGASUS L'ÉTALON NOIR*

Black. Horse. Power.

A radical creation that aims for speed. And ends up looking better than most customs

Ever wondered what Batman would compete with in a drag race for the fate of Gotham? Never mind that it's a very specific thing to be wondering about, we'd guess it'd be something like L'étalon Noir by Bad Winners from Paris, France. The name translates to 'black stallion' so the caped crusader may need to modify it to suit his garage, but everything else could probably stay as it is. That's because this is a serious piece of kit which is clearly the product of some serious thought.

Commissioned at the end of 2019 by Royal Enfield in order to compete at the Sultans of Sprint events around Europe, the project was then the victim of the universal chaos unleashed by COVID 19. However, at the beginning of 2021, Bad Winners was given the go-ahead to build a light and powerful dragster to be ready to ride at Punk's Peak, Basque country's famous racing road. And what an effort it is, indeed!

All of the Noir's attitude comes from function paring down form to the point where even the air around it starts seeming like excess. The only necessary things appear to be the exotic cycle parts, the bare minimum bodywork, and of course, that stonker of an engine. The bodywork itself is all carbon-fibre with a layer of polished lacquer which helps keep overall weight to a minimum. Those tasty wheels are Dymag UP7X aluminium units that are encircled by grippy Pirelli Diablo Super Corsa tyres. Meanwhile, braking duties are handled by a Beringer kit for the front and the rear — and it does have its task cut out thanks to that souped-up motor.

Bad Winners asked their partners, S&S Cycles of all-things-twin fame, to breathe some extra horsepower into the parallel-twin. It features a big-bore kit, a custom ECU, and a two-into-one exhaust, all made by S&S. A Carrillo connecting rod set keeps things in check inside in the engine, while a reinforced clutch system makes sure the extra power doesn't get overwhelming. And for the final blow, a can of nitrous oxide courtesy Nitrous Express, sits rather threateningly on the motor's left side, a can of laughing gas to leave its rivals in tears.

Now, can you believe that this radical machine started life as a Continental GT 650? Makes it seem like an alternate universe, right?! In any case, this low-and-mean expression of speed is quite the creation, one that stands on its own merit, even if it needs a bit of help to do so at standstill. Then again, this is one machine that was never built for standing still. It would look as much at home in a museum of motorsport art as it would on the starting line of a drag strip. Wonder how many motorcycles you could say that about

PIRELLI
DYMAG
NX
DYMAG

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DYMAG
NX

'BAR TALK

KEEPING TIME

KARTIK WARE
@kartikware

January 2023 hurtled past in roughly the same time a drag-spec RD 350 takes to smoke the quarter mile. Or at least that's what it seemed like. One moment I was saying, 'Happy New Year' and the next I was looking at the calendar wondering, 'What, it's February already?' Pacing around the house as I do when my brain refuses to reconcile the passage of time, it struck me that sometimes I have to stop and be grateful, and think about just how much of the past month I spent around motorcycles and motorcycle people. And then I realised all over again that time flies when you're having a good time.

I went to Jaisalmer for the Royal Enfield Super Meteor 650 media ride, though it was only a curtailed trip since I had to leave for Delhi within 24 hours for IMOTY/ICOTY jury duty. I missed riding from Jaisalmer to Khimsar, but I did spend a fantastic night with Alan Cathcart and my friends from RE, catch-ups that can never be too long and invariably end up hollering late into the night. The next day in Greater Noida, I found myself arranging motorcycles on the BIC's main straight for the traditional group photo, cracking jokes and laughing non-stop with peers who have become firm friends. Busy people with busier smartphones who made the most of whatever little time we had. And no, I didn't ride any of the bikes at the track, never have.

Later at the Auto Expo, the motorcycling presence felt like a ghost of its former self. I did see some promising Chinese motorcycles, though — laugh all you want, but if that 500cc V4 ever shows up in India, you may be obliged to choke on it. Wandering among the vast majority of EVs on display, I also formed the thought that electric scooters are absolutely fine, but I draw the line at motorcycles. Just leave them alone — take all the scooters, cars, buses and trucks you want. But the highlight remains the couple of nights spent crammed into a cold hotel room with the rest of the *Motoring* team, again talking and laughing till unearthly hours.

> "... I equate practically all of my life experiences to being on two wheels"

A few days later, I found myself staring at an old Bullet quietly rotting away in a garage in Goa. I was there for Ex-Man Sherman Nazareth's wedding, but I missed watching him ride his chrome Interceptor into the church for the morning wedding because in a deep sleep I decided my alarm was no boss of mine. Those three days were spent in the company of yet more motorcycle people, swapping stories short and tall, with the liberal and often questionable use of humour. It was an unforgettable time, even if I had to drive down to Goa instead of riding there, though I did take a liking to the blue Yamaha Fascino we rented. Having two wheels to your own self is non-negotiable, I suppose.

Between all this, I rode an old custom Bullet, a first-gen KTM 200 Duke, got the Super Meteor in Mumbai to spend proper time with, watched my own old Bullet being prepped for restoration, saw the new Pulsar and Apache and cast my mind back to the time I began this job, got mad at traffic, got even by getting ahead, and throttled each of the bikes in my garage to the stop. Each of these were stories in themselves, and I'm sure I'm forgetting more than a few bikes here. What a time.

In my mind, even if I might not say it out loud, I equate practically all of my life experiences to being on two wheels. I suppose it doesn't matter if it's motorcycles, charity, books, batteries, or a deep obsession with umbrellas. If we go down any road of our choosing with absolute sincerity, I'm willing to bet that the truths at the end are of a universal nature. If January was a two-stroke, the year may fly past like a MotoGP bike at full throttle down Mugello's main straight. No wonder it seems like I'm always running out of time.

[kartik.ware@delhipress.in]

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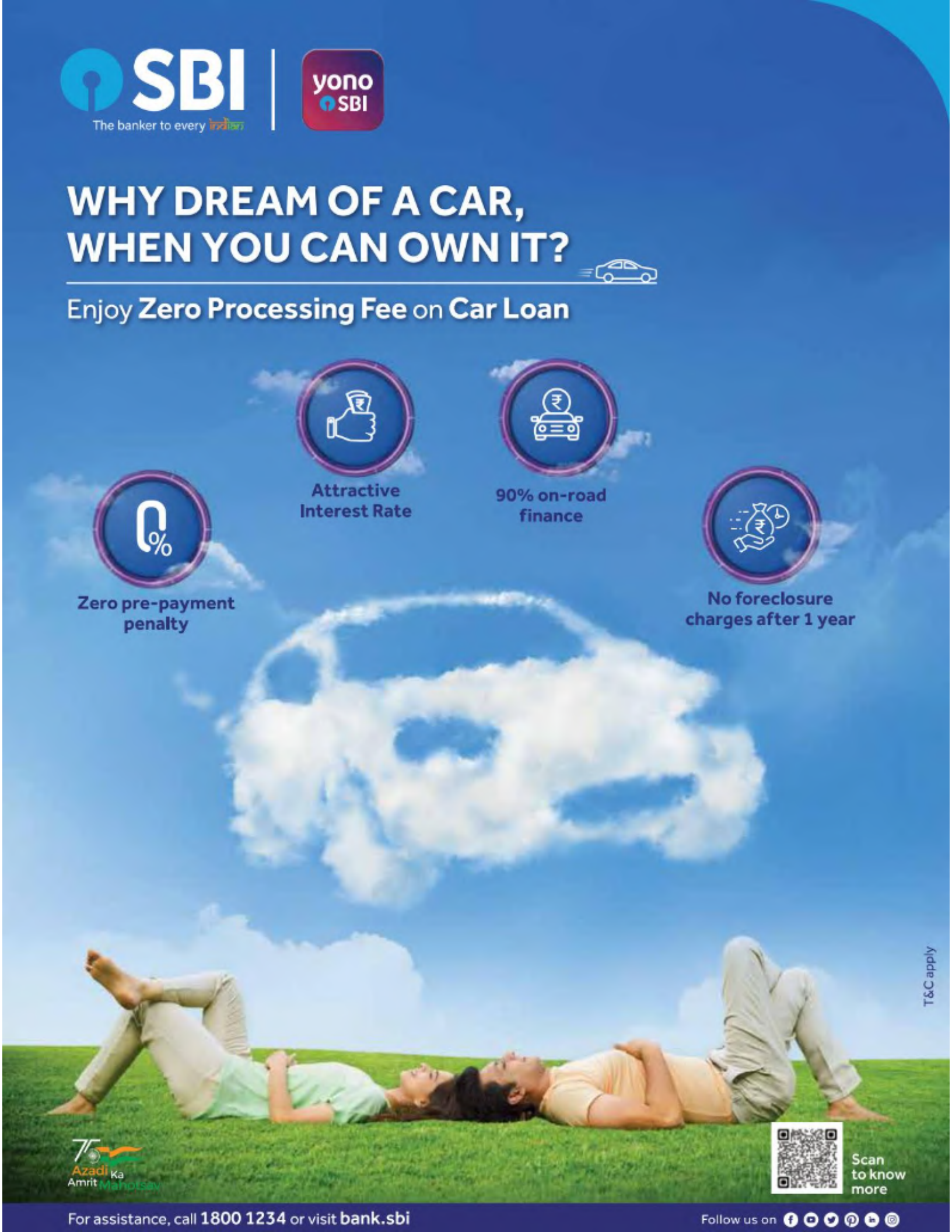

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